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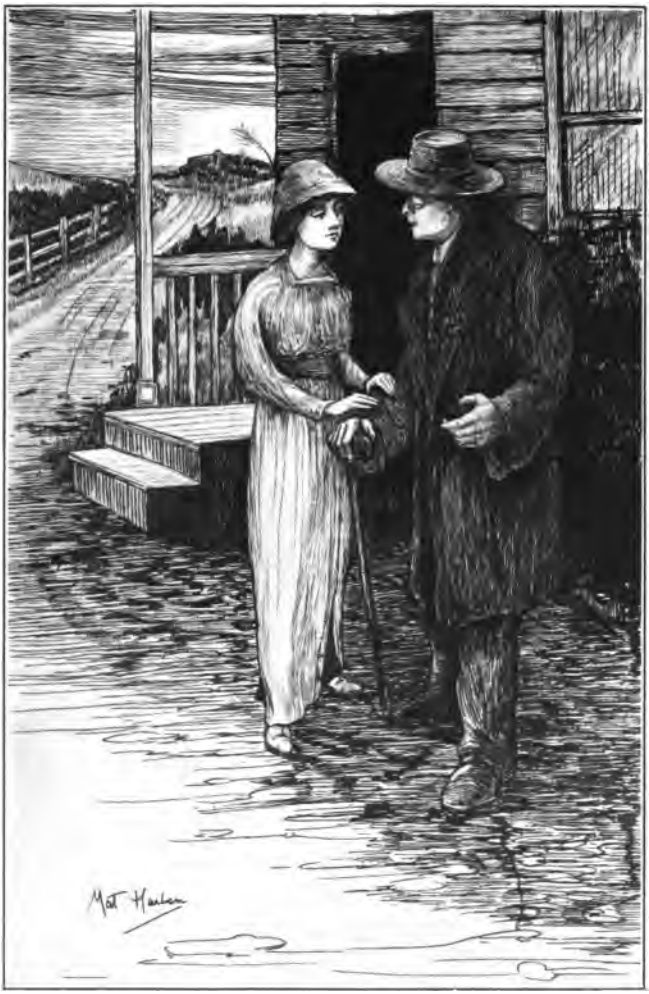

"And so Mace has a gentleman friend! Tell me about it, Uncle Benny."

The Woodneys

AN AMERICAN FAMILY

By J. BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

Author of "Fran," "Lahoma," etc.

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To My Mother

THIS PICTURE OF HOME LIFE
IS LOVINGLY INSCRIBED

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I

THE LETTER

ON THE Friday evening of the last week but one of Mace Woodney's school, she alighted at the post-office in Westville, thanked the obliging farmer who had driven her in from her boarding-house in the country, and found one letter for her father in the general delivery. It was The letter. But as it had been mailed on the train and consequently might be from anybody and contain anything, Mace regarded it merely as *a* letter; she carried it to the tiny cottage occupied by her family without any suspicion that something was about to happen.

Such was the joy and excitement on reaching home—for she had been absent an entire

week and in two days would have to return to her teaching—that at first the letter was overlooked. Even when she drew it forth they were too anxious to ascertain if she had been perfectly well, too eager to tell everything that happened since last Monday morning, and too inclined to relapse into fervent expressions of how glad they were to see her, to care anything about that envelope addressed to "Rev. Benjamin Woodney."

At last, however, the family settled into its accustomed peaceful attitude. The minister, whose dark glasses concealed the fact that he was totally blind, sat holding Mace's disengaged hand while she opened the letter with the other. His mother, erect of form and firm of face, seemed to have assumed all the dignity that belongs to the seventies without having incurred their physical liabilities. She was the more conscientious re-

garding forms and ceremonies because her daughter-in-law had never seemed to realize that she had married into a "high" family, while her son was too unworldly to regard the social height or depth of any creature. Old Mrs. Woodney, therefore, bore the family burden of traditional distinction upon her aged but unbending shoulders.

"Read it aloud," said Mace's mother—for no one felt that the letter, whomever it was from, belonged to one of them more than to the rest. "I'm listening," she added, seating herself before her manuscript on the dining-room table and taking up her pen. As one whose first novel had been accepted for publication six months before, and who expected every day to receive her first bound copies according to contract, Mrs. Geraldine Woodney took up her pen as one who knows what to do with it. She carefully scratched

out every word she had written that morning—evidently here was a literary worker with a future.

The lamp, placed equidistant between Mace's letter and her mother's manuscript, showed, on one side, a woman of middle age, pleasant-faced and serene, who spent more time in the contemplation of ideas than in their practical application—and, on the other side, a girl of nineteen, slight and pretty, whom one year's teaching had not robbed of healthful freshness.

Mace began the letter aloud: *"Dear Uncle Benny——"*

"Oh, oh!" her mother interrupted, "it must be from Lucile Petterly. She always would call your father 'Benny'—the only person who ever did."

"Yes," agreed old Mrs. Woodney, looking unusually stern, "it's certainly from

Lucile Petterly, heard from after ten years —not counting the newspaper reports. What in the world will we do?"

"What *can* we do!" her daughter-in-law groaned. "I'd like to catch up our furniture and run for the woods, but we have too many things."

"My dear," her husband expostulated mildly, "I see no cause for alarm. This is only a letter. Poor Lucile may be writing for our good; for if we can be any comfort to her, it will certainly be to our own blessing."

"She's writing for something," Mrs. Woodney agreed. "She always did when she wrote at all. She's the only Woodney that you couldn't keep at a distance when it suited her to be intimate, or catch with hounds if you needed her. As long as we had our property she lived in our house half

the time—and when we lost it, Good-by, Lucile! Go on, Mace."

"You will be surprised to hear from me and still more to learn the object of my letter."

"It'll be mighty hard for Lucile to surprise us," remarked old Mrs. Woodney. "Yes, she wants something—just wait and see. Watch, now; go on, Macie."

"I have grown sick and weary of the frivolities of society, and the mad rush of city life, and——"

"Pity," interposed Mrs. Woodney, "she hadn't got sick of it before she parted from poor Frank Petterly. That was the one trouble between 'em. He always wanted a home of his own and she always wanted to be in somebody else's. When he came home from the office he was met at the door by a function instead of a wife."

"Geraldine," returned her mother-in-law sedately, "since a fuss there had to be, I think we might as well take the side of our own kin. And you know that much as we loved poor Frank Petterly, a more obstinate and more fixedly notionate man never lived. Did Frank Petterly ever have one opinion that he ever gave up?"

"Yes, mother, one; he imagined he could get along with Lucile. Go on, Mace."

"My dears," said the blind minister gently, "perhaps this letter has been wafted to us by Providence as the means of bringing Frank and Lucile together once more. Mace, pray give us the text of the epistle."

"—and am homesick for the dear, dear old days when you and I and Aunt Geraldine would take baby Robert and baby Mace to camp for a week at a time on the river, fish-

ing when we pleased, and singing about our camp fire."

"Yes," Mrs. Woodney explained, "Lucile sang about the campfire while I prepared the meals. A more helpless woman never lived. If she hadn't married a rich man she must have starved, for work she couldn't. When she stayed with us everybody had to jump to wait on her."

"And so, dear Uncle Benny, I have decided to leave the world for a season and come to you——"

"Good Fathers Alive!" ejaculated old Mrs. Woodney, dismayed. "What will we do with her?"

"Where put her?" cried Mrs. Woodney, as if arguing with destiny. "There's no place. She *can't* come to us. Now, Benjamin, where is your Providence that wafted this letter? Every room is crowded to burst-

ing. I say nothing about suspending my literary work if she was in the house—of course we would have to dress and feed her and keep her on soft cushions; but I *do* say, where put her? With only four rooms in the house, folding beds in three of 'em, and the kitchen stove in the fourth, must we build a lean-to for Lucile to sleep in?"

"I'm afraid," her husband agreed mournfully, "that we must write to Lucile how we are circumstanced. She thinks of us as living as we did in the old days, and if she were in our humble cottage, fresh from the big city, she'd hardly know how to accommodate herself to our means."

His wife sighed with relief, for of course if the Rev. Benjamin Woodney had declared in favor of the visit, all must have acquiesced. "Yes," she said, "people used to city life know absolutely nothing about the

inconveniences of a little town in the West —they can't even imagine that such privations exist—conditions we think nothing about after we're used to them. You must write Lucile before you sleep this night, Mace. Go on."

"I trust it will be convenient for you to board me two or three months."

"We'd better telegraph to her," declared old Mrs. Woodney.

"Yes," Mr. Woodney agreed, "we'll 'phone a message to the station."

"Knowing your affection from of old—"

"Mace," said her mother, dipping her pen in the ink, "just wake me up when you are done with that letter." And she began to write on her new story.

—"and your unfailing hospitality——"

Mr. Woodney groaned.

"I shall take your welcome for granted.

Do not go to the least trouble for me. I ask nothing better than your own mode of life, close to nature's heart—plenty of rich cream, delicious sweet butter with its golden glow, fresh eggs every day——"

"I wish," remarked old Mrs. Woodney, "that she could smell the butter we have in the pantry. Or could give us a recipe for making the hens lay."

"—And good old country ham——"

"Benjamin, when did you last see any country ham?"

He shook his head. "Mother, I don't know. Not since we moved to this little village."

"A king could ask no better."

"She'd better marry a title, then, and get in with royalty if she wants to live as they do. Go on, Mace."

"I am starting for your hamlet this after-

noon; but as I shall stop by the way to visit other relations, there is no telling when I shall reach your home. As I have directed all my mail to be forwarded to you, I shall not be able to hear from you till we meet face-to-face. My love to Aunt Geraldine——"

"Wake her up, Mace," gasped the minister.

"It's too late to write!" cried out old Mrs. Woodney, as if just released from a spell.

"Or to telegraph!" exclaimed Mace, dropping the letter.

"What is the matter?" demanded Mrs. Geraldine Woodney, looking up, aware that she was in the midst of a sensation.

Mace snatched up the paper feverishly: *"I can hardly wait till we meet.*

"With bushels of love, your niece,

"(Miss) Lucile Vizzingham."

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Woodney, dropping her pen. "Who?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried old Mrs. Woodney. "Don't you see? She has taken back her maiden name. She wants us to introduce her as 'Miss Vizzingham' instead of 'Mrs. Petterly.' 'Miss Vizzingham,' indeed! Well, I fear all the ham she'll find in this place will be in her own name."

"'Miss Vizzingham!'" exclaimed Mrs. Geraldine Woodney, slowly absorbing the contents of the letter with her own eyes. "Yes—she's coming.... Yes—she'll be here. 'Miss Vizzingham!' And suppose her child comes to visit her, what will our old-fashioned neighbors think?"

II

BONAPARTE'S ARRIVAL

"THE levee is breaking!" cried Mrs. Woodney the next day, when three letters came for "Miss Lucile Vizzingham" in care of Rev. Benjamin Woodney. The flood of correspondence continued to pour into Westville until at last Mrs. Woodney declared, "The crevasse can never be repaired!"—that was when three trunks were unloaded upon the front porch, leaving but a narrow and winding trail from the steps to the door. In the meantime the owner of the trunks hovered in the mysterious distance; but the letters and papers swamped the modest lockbox of the minister.

Mace had finished her first year's teaching

with every prospect of being called to occupy the same district chair next fall, and all the family were enjoying her rest—for in a sense they had been teaching with her during nine months—when Robert came home for his weekly visit. That was Sunday afternoon, for only between two and seven P.M. once a week could he be spared from the farm, five miles distant, where he was employed as a "farmhand." As it took him about an hour to walk in, and another to walk out—the farmer was thoughtful of his horses and did not want them used on rest days—the Woodneys never had time to say all they wanted to say, much less to listen to each other. Consequently at three o'clock all were on the watch-tower—that is to say, perched upon the pretentious-looking trunks on the front porch—holding dozens of impatient messages in leash.

"There he comes!" suddenly exclaimed Mace, starting down the path to meet him, waving her sunbonnet as she ran.

"What on earth is that he's got with him?" cried old Mrs. Woodney, hastily exchanging her "near specs" for her "far specs" and glaring at one of the most woebegone-looking wrecks that had ever been a horse; it seemed to her that Robert was not so much leading this feeble creature as aiding it along the road.

"Mother," said the blind minister apprehensively, "is it Lucile?"

Mrs. Geraldine Woodney looked up from her tablet and poised her fountain pen. "No, Benjamin, it's much too old; and I think it's a male."

"It is not a male," returned old Mrs. Woodney decidedly. "At least, such is my

judgment. What can Robert be doing with such a skin-and-bones?"

"I think he must have met it on the road and is lending it a hand."

Robert, a stalwart young man of twenty-two, whose handsome, dreamy face seemed oddly at variance with his rough clothes, now accosted the group: "Shall I bring him in the front yard or around to the back?"

"Can't he go any farther?" his mother asked tentatively.

"Why, mother! He's our horse; I bought him for three dollars of a camper not half an hour ago. There was our empty barn for him to stay in, and the back lot we never use; and besides, not to buy a horse when you can get him for three dollars would be mighty bad business."

"Son," exclaimed the minister in distress, "have you forgotten that this is the Lord's

Day? Any business on this day is bad except the Lord's business."

Robert's face fell. He came toward the porch, leaving the horse standing in the middle of the road with the assurance to Mace that he wouldn't move. "Father, he was tied to the end of a mover's wagon and being dragged along half dead, and I reckon would have dropped in another mile or so; and it seemed to me it was an act of charity to buy him; it was a sort of home-missionary work brought to my very door. At the same time I won't deny that it seemed a lucky thing for us. There's something in owning a horse that's different from anything else, not only the name of it, but the feeling. Mace was telling me about Cousin Lucile coming; well, she'll need a horse to get around over the country."

Old Mrs. Woodney exclaimed, "Lucile

Petterly would no sooner seat herself behind that beast than she'd expect me to carry her up and down stairs. But now that your three dollars are gone——"

"Yes," her daughter-in-law agreed, "there's nothing for us to do but be cheerful. We're mighty glad to see *you,* Robert, so kiss us all around, and we'll get on our old clothes——"

"All except me," the old lady stipulated, "for it nearly tires me to death to dress; and besides, somebody should look respectable——"

"All except your grandmother," Mrs. Geraldine Woodney agreed; "and we'll go to the barn, which I think is the dirtiest place in Westville, and we'll bed down your horse, for it is certainly unable to keep much longer on its legs, and we'll have a regular lark——"

"Geraldine!" remonstrated the distressed minister.

"It won't be too gay a lark for Sunday," his wife reassured him. "None of us—unless it's Robert—feels too festive for the day. Is the beast named?"

"I don't know," Robert confessed; "I didn't ask the gypsy."

"Then we'll call him Bonaparte, for every rib can be easily distinguished."

There was a general movement toward the closets where old clothes hung on Sundays. Despite Mr. Woodney's scrupulous respect for the day, a spirit of adventure had begun to tingle in his veins, the more so, doubtless, because he was unable to behold the new arrival. "Geraldine," he asked, as he hurried out of his dress suit, "what color is it?"

"What, Bonaparte? I think he used to

be a dun, but he's been out in the weather so long it's hard to tell."

Mrs. Woodney had scarcely exaggerated the untoward condition of the barn. Until recently they had rented it out for the use of a delivery-horse, hoping—but vainly—to add enough to their income to keep the interest paid on the mortgage. In their old clothes, then, they sallied forth tolerably secure from company because the neighbors considerately left them alone with Robert during his brief visits. There was good-natured but active rivalry between Mace and Robert as to who should lead Mr. Woodney by the hand, as this was considered the highest distinction fortune could bestow. Mrs. Woodney sacrificed her own desire for her children, solacing herself by taking along her unfinished novel.

"I never know when I'm going to get

some ideas," said Mrs. Woodney, "and if I don't put 'em down while they're hot, I never think much of 'em."

Robert, convinced by Mace's earnest arguments, left his father to her guidance, while he devoted all his care and attention to transporting the broken-down nag from the road to the back lot. He and Bonaparte went first; then Mace, leading her father; then Mrs. Woodney. Old Mrs. Woodney watched mournfully from the back porch. Her daughter-in-law waved her tablet at her and cried:

"His last days at St. Helena!"

They brought Bonaparte water, but he would not drink; corn, but he had no teeth; hay, but he refused to suffer a stem to enter his mouth; however, at sight of it he went down on his foreknees.

"He's been well cared for," said Robert

with pride. "He isn't hungry, only tired. See, he knows I'm making up his bed." He hurried to throw more hay on the ground. Bonaparte looked around at the ground, saw that it was but scantily covered, and rolled his eyes at the group.

"Soldiers!" cried Mrs. Woodney, "to your posts!" And she and Mace hurried to assist Robert, for the horse was in desperate haste to stretch out upon his side. "I wonder if he will ever rise again?"

"If not," remarked Mace, with the air of one to be easily consoled, "no doubt his last days will be his best days."

"I think he'll come out of this," Robert declared cheerfully. "Plenty of good food ground up for him, and a long, long rest, and kind words will do wonders. He'll come out of this all right."

"Robin," replied his mother, "there's one

thing you never come out of, once you've entered in. If you want to know, I mean venerable old age. Let us all go up in the loft and lie on the hay, and talk and talk and talk."

"And I'll be father's guide," declared Robert decidedly, "for I've been away all week, and Mace is getting selfish. I know her school was out only two days ago; but she'll have father to herself all summer."

"You can have him this time," said Mace with the air of a martyr, "but as to having him to myself this summer, have you forgotten that Cousin Lucile is coming to absorb the whole family? But take him, Rob, this once."

III

SHALL ROBERT PROPOSE?

WITH infinite care and tenderness Robert assisted his father up the perpendicular ladder to the loft, while Mace and Mrs. Woodney offered advice and caution how best to grasp the wormeaten sides and how avoid the looser rounds. Once on the hay in the loft, they stretched out luxuriously, where the southern breeze could ripple over them from the open loft door, and there was much conversation into which the minister sought, whenever possible, to inject some spiritual meaning. Whenever he did this, a solemn pause would fall upon his family while the feeling prevailed that they were having too good a time; but soon their

thoughts would go scurrying away into the burrows and bypaths of their temporal kingdom.

Robert, who all this time had been trying to find courage to make a startling revelation involving his heart and possibly his future destiny, was just on the eve of broaching the all-important theme when his mother made a discovery.

"Look!" she cried, pointing, "yonder is Lucile's stipulated egg."

From a box in a distant corner a hen looked out inquiringly; Mrs. Woodney's mind had leaped from cause to effect. "It must be Mrs. Henry's hen that she has missed lately. Ours be the fruit of her trespassing!"

"My dear," exclaimed Mr. Woodney, distressed, "the egg must be taken to Mrs.

Henry. We raise no chickens and no eggs are due us."

"But this is our mortgaged barn, Benjamin, and until the mortgage is foreclosed everything laid in here is ours, from eggs to Bonaparte."

"Mother," interposed Robert, "I have something very serious to tell you and father that's been on my mind a long time."

"More serious than that egg? For when Lucile comes she must have 'em new-laid, and they're thirty cents a dozen."

"It's more serious than anything else on earth," he declared, his face beginning to burn.

"If the egg must go to Mrs. Henry," cried Mace, jumping up, "let the hen take it to her—shoo! shoo!" And she darted toward the box. The hen stood her ground as long as she dared—for she was sitting—

then flew screaming to the loft door and made a noisy descent to the ground. In the box nothing had been left by the barn rats but an old door-knob.

"What a determined hen!" exclaimed Mrs. Woodney, as frantic cluckings continued to assail them from below. "But the strongest will in the world can't produce chickens of door-knobs—there's an idea." She grasped her tablet. "Benjamin, would you put it down?"

"No, my dear, it won't seem so great to you after it's in black and white; and I think it would be hard to work it into any sort of tale."

"Oh, mother!" Mace exclaimed, looking from the outer door, "grandmother is standing on the back porch waving at us like mad. Listen!"

From afar came a carefully guarded but

keenly distinct voice: "Company's coming! Company's coming!"

"They mustn't come!" cried Robert rebelliously; "I have only one poor hour left to be with you and I haven't told you the great news."

"We've been too happy," his mother sighed. "Company always comes when we're too happy. It's sent to chasten us."

Mr. Woodney rose hopefully. "I'll venture it's brother Henry come to discuss my morning's sermon. He nearly always wants me to go over it with him alone."

Mrs. Woodney looked at Robert, then closed her eyes, dropped her head, and seemed to fall into a trance, thus informing her son that Mr. Henry had, as usual, slept through the morning service. After this brief pantomime she reminded them that they must slip to the house to get back into

their other clothes while old Mrs. Woodney would presumably keep the company safely sequestered in the front room. In their haste to descend the ladder and at the same time insure the minister's safety, mistakes led to ill-advised laughter, which broke out from first one, then the other, in half-smothered titters, like darting flames from a smouldering bonfire of autumn leaves.

"How is our gallant Bonaparte?" inquired Mr. Woodney, whose imagination was too charitable to reach the extremities of the beast's condition.

"He still imperially holds his couch," Mrs. Woodney informed him. The laughter broke out anew. They traversed the back lot. The sitting hen, fancying them in pursuit, fled before, cackling and half choking with wrath, and at last rose in air and flew

upon the back porch, where she madly scraped the door with her agitated wings.

Mrs. Woodney and Mace, almost too weak by this time from laughter to stand erect, were close to the porch, and Mr. Woodney, in Robert's loving care, was not far behind when the back door opened and a lady looked out inquiringly. She was about thirty-five years old, slender and graceful, daintily pretty, and dressed with that exquisite modesty and simplicity only to be achieved by well-trained taste and a well-filled purse. Although there was nothing in her apparel to excite particular remark, it was evident at a glance that she did not belong to Westville.

"Lucile!" exclaimed Mrs. Woodney, sobered in an instant, seeing herself as Lucile saw her, "look to yourself!"

The maddened hen swooped into the

lady's skirts, scratched her way past, and with widely stretched legs ran into the room. There was no more laughter. Behind the newly arrived guest stood old Mrs. Woodney, making signs that she had done her best to keep her in the front room, and must not therefore be blamed for failure. Lucile was mildly surprised at the appearance of her relations' old clothes, and decidedly afraid of the hen, which was now as eager to get out as it had been to enter. Mrs. Woodney and Mace were oppressed by consciousness of the difference between their appearance and that of their city kinswoman. But the minister was as courtly and genial in one coat as in another, and Robert, always immensely proud of him, obeyed his wish and led him directly forward.

"Lucile," cried Mr. Woodney, "this is a blessed day that brings you to our roof—for

it is still our roof. The last time we met I could look into your face, but I do not repine. This physical temple must some day be unroofed and fall to ruins, and the part of you that really matters will be as visible to me now as when I had my eyesight."

His niece was touched. "I'm afraid, Uncle Benny, the part of me that really matters doesn't matter very much."

"Oh, yes it does, yes it does," he assured her with a smile. "Why, my dear, you're worth a Prince's ransom. What a high value God has set on our souls! It makes us happy. I welcome you to our home, Lucile. I trust we'll be a blessing to you."

"And let's go into the front room," added Mrs. Woodney. "I always feel worth more in the front of the house."

"I insisted on seeing you just as you are," Lucile explained genially—she had been mo-

mentarily subdued by Mr. Woodney's manner—"because, you know, we are to live together for several months." As they went to the front, and for a good while after they had taken their seats, Lucile maintained a lively monologue on the various kinsfolk she had visited during the past week, and on her life during the past ten years, avoiding any allusion to her divorced husband. She was a good talker and a steady. As one by one the family retired to dress up, she kept right on talking, giving not the slightest sign of distress that fuel for her conversational fires was running low. As each one of the Woodneys, the minister excepted, was just as eager to talk as herself, and as the minister was uneasy under the worldliness of her exposition, all regarded her with something of a wandering eye.

At last Mrs. Woodney spoke: "Lucile,

Robert will soon be obliged to go back to the farm, and he has something important to tell us before he goes."

"Yes," said Robert, instantly rising and facing his father and mother, his hands nervous and his face blushing, "time's short and so—so I want your advice right now about—about proposing to Nellie Glenston."

"Oh, Robert, Robert!" wailed his mother. "*You*—propose? Propose *what?*"

"Why, mother—er—myself, of course."

Lucile rose tactfully. "While you discuss family matters——"

"That's all right," returned Robert, "keep your seat; you're one of us now. I want your advice, father—and mother—and——"

"But, my son," said his father gravely, "have you considered carefully the responsibilities of supporting a wife? Far be it from me to deprive you of such blessed happiness

as my family has brought to me. But this house may be sold from over our heads any day; nothing but the generosity of Mr. Glenston keeps us here. He could have foreclosed three months ago. You see we'd be of no help to you, and the fact is, I don't know what we'd do without your wages. Nevertheless——"

"I know I couldn't marry her now; but she might agree to wait."

"I think you'd better wait before you propose," declared his mother.

"I think so, too," cried old Mrs. Woodney.

"It's not so easy to wait as you think," returned Robert, blushing more deeply. "There are times when things come to a point. This has. It's got to where I—to where it seems to be expected."

"Does she care for you, Rob?" Mace inquired judicially.

"Yes. I know she does. Of course she'll agree to wait."

"Since you haven't proposed," said his father slowly, "how can you know that Nellie cares for you?"

"Well—" Robert hesitated. "The fact is —you might as well know it all—she didn't object when I—you see, I'm awfully fond of her, and when I kissed her——"

"Oh, Robert!" reproached his mother. "How *could* you. Why *did* you?"

"I seemed moved to," Robert answered desperately. "I don't believe it's easy to explain. I hadn't intended it. Then it happened. And she took it—she took it all right. So I believe she loves me as I love her. And I am sure she'd agree to wait. But there's her father. You can't tell how he'd take it."

"I think *I* can tell," remarked old Mrs. Woodney dryly.

"Yes," said Robert, "I'm afraid it would be that way. Then if he *did* take it that way, of course I'd lose my job with him. And if he got real mad he might foreclose the mortgage; and as he's president of the district school board, Mace might lose her position next fall."

"Well," remarked his mother, "that's what would be lost. And now, what would be gained?"

Robert cried out emphatically, "The dearest, sweetest girl on earth."

"But you wouldn't gain her," Mace demurred, disapproving of the whole affair.

"No, Mace," remarked her mother, "but he'd get first option, don't you see?"

"Cousin Lucile," said Robert, sitting down by her, "what do you think?"

He looked so handsome, so boyish, despite his broad shoulders and superior height, that she could not help smiling from pure liking. But she grew grave at once.

"I don't understand," she faltered, looking about from face to face. "Surely you haven't mortgaged your home? You all seem so happy—and can it be that Robert—that he hires out to a farmer—isn't it his own farm?"

"We're the happiest people in the world," Mr. Woodney declared. "We mortgaged our house, not our home. When you knew us, Lucile, we were encumbered with this world's goods—but I went a good man's security—he couldn't help himself, so I had to pay. Never call us poor while we have each other. We're heirs of the Kingdom and that's better than being millionaires of Wall Street."

"I can't advise Robert," Lucile declared. "This is all quite beyond my experience—it's a new world, for it's a real home."

"When our book is published," said old Mrs. Woodney, "it may save the day."

"What!" exclaimed Lucile, looking at the elderly lady, "have you written a book?"

"Well," old Mrs. Woodney conceded, "Geraldine *wrote* the book, but it's our book just the same. We stand together, Lucile, and I guess for the next week all of us will feel that we're getting ourselves ready to pop the question."

All of them laughed at the idea of old Mrs. Woodney partaking of the terrors and delights of courtship—all except Robert, who was too much in earnest, and Lucile, who was too strangely moved for words. She started up rather wildly, went swiftly to

the minister's chair, and sank upon her knees beside him, tears bathing her face.

Presently her sobs were interrupted by broken words. "A real home—all stand together—I never knew what it meant before!"

IV

GETTING BREAKFAST

THAT night when Lucile went to bed in Robert's room she felt as strange to herself as to her surroundings. She was besieged by memories of her childhood, which for years had been crowded from her brain by a life of desperate haste and feverish excitement in a distant city. It was natural that a visit to her uncle should recall her girlhood, but these memories seemed to belong to the present rather than to the past, as if they were part of the atmosphere of the Woodney family. Perhaps it was because there was something childlike about all the Woodneys that she found herself re-

covering something of her long-forgotten youth.

But what she noticed most about the family, that which touched her most deeply, was their cheerful acceptance of individual peculiarities. Every one of them was wholly unlike the rest and yet the music of their spirits was in perfect harmony. It was splendid, but Lucile did not understand it. It could not but please her, yet it was disturbing. It made her think of her past relationship to her divorced husband, and their son, now exiled to a boarding-school in Germany. Her honeymoon had been bright enough, for the marriage had been one of mutual affection; but in the dark of the moon . . .

Lucile compelled herself to exclude Frank Petterly from her mind, since her only hope of peace was in forgetfulness, and as she lay

awake far into the night, she formed plans for the Woodneys. Her coming must be that of a fairy godmother—Mace should have her school next fall, the one she had taught, or a better one; the mortgage interest should be paid; Uncle Benjamin should preach to his heart's content; Aunt Geraldine's book should sell if Lucile had to buy up the edition; and Robert should marry that farmer's daughter and be happy ever after. If, in bringing all this about, Lucile was not made happy, it would at least occupy her mind with happy thoughts in the place of musings over broken ties and vanished hopes.

She could not understand that the quickest way to have relieved the family would have been her departure on the morrow; for Lucile had never thought herself of any trouble to those whom she visited. Her dis-

position was so strong to help the family, how could her presence bring them anything but joy? She rose the next morning as soon as she heard sounds from the kitchen, determined to be up with the lark while sojourning in the country village. Of course she missed her maid, and her bath still more, but before her marriage to rich Frank Petterly she had been wont to perform her ablutions in a quart of water, because the spring was a long way from the house, and the hill steep; she could do it again.

She did it again. And having put on the morning robe that looked most in keeping with the carpet, wall paper and window shades, she opened her side door and was at once in the kitchen. The fire in the cooking-stove was already lighted, and Mrs. Geraldine Woodney had drawn her chair before the outside door, through which stole the de-

licious early breezes of late May. She had hastily assumed a loose wrapper, which evidently concealed her nightgown, while a sunbonnet hid the hair, not yet dressed.

"Come right in," said Mrs. Woodney, "though you might as well have slept an hour or two longer. I slipped in early because Benjamin insists on making the fire, and has to be circumvented. It's a race to the stove every morning—mother beat us yesterday. But because the fire's made before sun-up doesn't argue that we'll have an early breakfast. I like to take my time and think it all out as I go along. Mother would like for me to plan my breakfast the evening before, but you see I have my book to think about; I like to sleep on it."

"You haven't any girl, Aunt Geraldine?"

"One girl and one boy. And a daughter-in-law to be spoken for. But I know what

you mean—no, girls won't hire out in Westville unless you're sick or in trouble. Especially with Mace out of school. They'd say to me, 'What's the matter with your daughter? Let *her* do the work.' We have Independence Day the year round in Westville. Well, I'd better start something." Mrs. Woodney looked about her helplessly, then slowly rose. The potato box was empty. "I thought we had at least one mess," she murmured dejectedly. "And Robert ate all the cold biscuits. The crackers are out." She explored the shelves. "No more rice, thank goodness! Bless me, I didn't think we'd ever see the last of that Saturday evening's beefsteak, but it also is gone! Do you eat cornbread, Lucile?"

"Hot cakes, Aunt Geraldine?"

She shook her head. "No, Lucile, hot cakes make you get up and down. I never

liked to get up and down. But a hoecake is different. You stay with it till it's brown, and then all's said and done. I can't think of anything on the place—except that horse. We will cook a hoecake."

As she sifted the meal, first Mace, then her grandmother thrust a disheveled head through the inner door with the purpose of "circumventing Benjamin"—saw the fire, and vanished like ghosts before the rising sun.

As Lucile rested in the chair in the doorway she tried to tell her aunt how deeply she sympathized with the family in their reverses of fortune. Mrs. Woodney looked at the slender form in its exquisitely fitted robe, at the sensitive face, which seemed imploring life to pass quickly, and smiled reassuringly.

"Don't you worry about us, Lucile. Our

poverty strikes you as something strange and uncomfortable, but it's like our own skin to us. Doesn't matter what your condition, if you can wear it like an own skin to you, you can be comfortable."

She looked to see if the water was hot enough to mix with the meal, and as it wasn't, she drew up another chair beside Lucile and seated herself with a sigh of content. "And there's always my book ahead. You never know what fortune may be in the selling of your book, especially when it's your first. It may go off in a landslide of a hundred thousand copies or it may not sell at all. Nothing like uncertainty about the future when one's present is as fixed as ours. Anything may happen to us, any day. We may be millionaires three months from now, and we may have the roof sold from over us, nobody knows. But I think the roof will go

first. When Robert asks Mr. Glenston for Nellie's hand, which he's going to do at the very first opening, there'll be a crisis. You see, Mr. Glenston looks on Robert merely as a hired hand, while Robert considers his service as an incident. Robert knows what he is, and I may tell you, Lucile, that boy has some of the deepest thoughts I've ever heard expressed—really, they're profound. But he's never had any thoughts he could use; they're always speculative. So you see he feels himself infinitely remote from Mr. Glenston, who is nothing but a practical farmer and stockman. But Mr. Glenston doesn't understand Robert's attitude, for it doesn't seem to reach anything. He expects Nellie to marry some rich farmer, and just because she's been kissed by Robert will cut no figure with him."

"But if Nellie loves Robert——"

"I've no doubt she does; I don't see how she could help it. Maybe she'll be true to him—and if my book sells they may not have to wait so long after all. But I rather fancy she won't wait if another handsome young man comes along. Nellie Glenston is just an ordinary girl in real life—as you and I were; I doubt if she'd do a thing that book-girls do. You see, if we described girls in our books as they are in real life, real girls wouldn't want to read about 'em. A girl reads a book to see acted out all the dream part of her that gets lost in the scuffle."

"Yes, yes, Aunt Geraldine, how well you understand! That's why I am always in society—going, going, going. It's to forget myself, it's to bring back what I used to dream about. Some people think I'm frivolous, but I'm just trying to forget myself. For a time I succeeded. That's all I can ex-

pect from life now—to forget my disappointments, to live for a few hours as if my heart were not broken. If I were as happy as you I'd give up all I have and take your hardships gladly. All of you are so happy in each other—it's perfectly wonderful! Poor dear Uncle Benny doesn't seem to remember for a moment that he's blind. If I were stone-blind I know I could never smile again—and he seems so *happy*. He doesn't seem to *care*. He used to have such handsome brown eyes, so full of light—it would kill me. I wouldn't want to live."

When Mace came out, fully dressed, Mrs. Woodney said, "Daughter, I wish you'd take up the breakfast from the point I've brought it."

"Yes, mother—" she looked about. "What have you done?"

"Why, the meal's sifted, and I suppose

the water is hot. The fact is, Lucile and I have been discussing Higher Things. And I discovered that we didn't have anything to warm over."

"Oh, yes," said Mace, lifting a stovelid, "we must warm over your fire, as you've let it go out." She rekindled the fire, then seated herself on the doorstep facing the other two. There was a wholesome bloom on her cheeks, a frank directness of the eyes wanting in Lucile; but, on the other hand, Lucile showed the unmistakable air imparted by contact with the great world, that showed in marked contrast to the simplicity of the village maiden. Each would gladly have surrendered her charms for the other's —Mace, her splendid strength and innocence; Lucile, her fastidious taste and knowledge of the world.

"This must seem very different to you,

Cousin Lucile," remarked Mace wistfully, "after your apartments in the city."

Lucile looked about the kitchen, and was so struck by the difference, which in conversation with Mrs. Woodney she had felt but vaguely, that she was too overpowered to murmur a polite negative; presently she was describing her luxurious quarters and her manner of life, and there was something so exciting in her declaration that Mace must go back with her for a month at least that the world stood still until old Mrs. Woodney appeared at the door. At sight of her both Mace and her mother started up guiltily.

"Children," said the old lady, putting them in the same class, "I declare I feel as weak as a rag. Haven't you started breakfast yet? I really need something to go on, and'll either have to have a bite or get to bed at once."

"The bread is provided for," said Mrs. Woodney, reassuringly. "Mace, you'll have to run to the meat market, for Robert ate the last of that Saturday evening steak." Lucile opened her eyes wide at hearing the steak for the second time given its proper date as if it were an historical event. "Lucile, what would you suggest?"

"There's nothing more nourishing than mutton," Lucile decided.

"Yes, but they hardly ever have mutton in Westville, and never at this time of the year."

"Oh, well, I was only thinking of Grandmother; as for me, I like fish as well as anything. I don't like mutton myself."

"We never have fish. And now that you've mentioned what you like and don't like, we'll fry some eggs, Mace, if Mrs. Henry can spare us five fresh eggs; remem-

ber, five; for if you say six one will be an old egg, for she only gets five a day. Mrs. Henry is a mighty good woman; but if you order half a dozen eggs, one of those eggs has been salted down."

"My dears," said Mr. Woodney, opening the door, "is there room for me?"

"Yes, Benjamin," his wife answered, "for Mace is just going after the five eggs. Sit here by Lucile, and I will see if the water is hot."

"It is not hot," said old Mrs. Woodney, drawing a moistened finger from the tea-kettle, and sinking upon the edge of the wood box. "It is not hot, and I need something to go on. I am of an age," she explained to Lucile, "that calls for all the stays and props that art and nature can supply. Do you remember your cousin Johnson, Lucile, who was Governor of Virginia? He

grew to be very, very old. He always said that if he just had something to go on——"

"Yonder comes Robert!" exclaimed Mrs. Woodney in dismay, as she caught sight of her son trudging up the road. "He's lost his job—he'll give us something to go on, mother. Oh, oh—coming home *Monday morning*. He must have found his 'opening' and asked for Nellie's hand. There he comes—*that's* his answer!"

V

ROBERT'S OPENING

THEY waited in mute awe till the young man stepped over the doorsill. He did not seem surprised to find all the family gathered in the kitchen, and the breakfast as yet but a remote possibility. Indeed, the look in his eyes said that his thoughts were far away. He smiled at them in mechanical fashion and leaned against the wall where there was just room for his broad shoulders.

"What luck, Robert?" inquired his father, who would not have inquired could he have seen the dejected countenance.

"I found my 'opening,' " said Robert, giving himself a shake. "And—and I crawled

right through. It was about five this morning.

"Tell us your story," said his mother sympathetically, yet with a certain zest.

"Well, last night I made everything all right with Nellie; so this morning I was feeling high. When I went out to milk, Mr. Glenston was up and about, and it just came to me that then would be a good time to tackle him, while he was fresh from his bed and his mind wasn't filled up with the cares and troubles of the day. A sort of tablet, his mind was, and I thought I would inscribe on it while it was blank."

Mrs. Woodney gave Lucile a significant look as if calling attention to one of her son's prodigious Thoughts.

"It just came to me," Robert continued, "that here was my opening. So it was all over in a very few minutes. I was perfectly

frank and—and so was he. The only interest he showed in my plans at all was when I told him, 'Very well, I would go to New York City and make my fortune, for Nellie would wait.' And he said when I made my fortune he'd like to see it. That's all. My! but I was awful blue when I started here; but somehow I feel better now, just having you folks grouped around me—everything'll come out all right; I'm young and strong and Nellie is as true as steel."

"But how came you to threaten him with New York City?" asked old Mrs. Woodney.

"It wasn't exactly a threat. I decided then and there to go East. The thought just came to me."

"My son, my son!" ejaculated Mrs. Woodney in distress. "You could never get along in New York. It's—it's too big. And

you know nothing about city life and city temptations."

"I have enough saved up to take me there," cried Robert, his eyes glowing with heroism, "but not enough to throw me in the way of temptations. As soon as I arrive I'll get work. The biggest fortunes in the country are made in New York City. There's more money there than in all the rest of America. It's concentrated. And most of the millionaires were once poor boys."

"My son," exclaimed his father, distressed, "it would break our hearts for you to turn all your splendid energies to the accumulation of wealth. I do not think great fortunes are good for the soul; you would much better remain meek and humble. I don't believe you'll find a single guide-post in the Word of God pointing your footsteps toward Wall Street."

"Well, father, don't you want me to win Nellie's hand? Her father will never consent unless I have a fortune. I want to be a millionaire for Mr. Glenston's sake."

"It all sounds very worldly," sighed Mrs. Woodney, "but surely it will not be very wrong if you draw a line somewhere. You'll not be walking in the straight and narrow way, my son; but for mercy's sake don't wander so far that you'll lose sight of it, for you'll need to get back into it at time of danger. It seems hard, sometimes, to tread that path, but it's mighty comforting and safe to be in it at time of danger."

"It distresses me," declared the minister. "Are we only to keep close to the Lord in time of robbers? Are we to use Him as a Policeman? No, no, let us all trust everything to Him and base our trust on the strength of our constant loyalty."

"Then I don't know what to do," said Robert dispiritedly, looking about for a chair to sink upon, and, finding none, taking a fresh brace against the wall. His dejection touched every heart, and a compromise was diligently sought.

"I believe the Lord will understand and overlook a—just a temporary excursion into the kingdom of the world," murmured Mrs. Woodney. "I don't mind that so much as fearing Robert would get run over by taxicabs—which none of us ever saw, unless it's Lucile—and all that dreadful rush on Broadway."

"'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,'" exclaimed Mr. Woodney, raising his sightless face. "My son, you have come to the parting of the ways. On one side is riches, on the other—peace, perfect peace."

"I don't believe," said old Mrs. Woodney,

"that the Lord will ever have cause to be dissatisfied with Robert over the millions he accumulates. And I don't believe he'll get run over, for they say there are police at every corner to lead strangers across the streets. But what is he to do when he gets there? Lucile is a city woman; let her express her opinion."

"I am obliged to discourage you, Robert," Lucile declared. "I believe you stand a far better chance of making a good living here than in New York. There are hundreds of applicants for every position already on the ground."

"Yes," said Robert, "but the wealth is there. That's how I look at it. I could make a living here, but not become wealthy. I might not become wealthy in New York, but I'd know all the time that the wealth was

there. It's our biggest city and contains the most wealth."

"But, my dear cousin, that wealth is confined to comparatively few."

"So much the better. I want to be one of the few. And the wealth is there, that's what I consider. You can't be a millionaire if you don't go where the millions are. I want some of those millions to be confined to me."

His father groaned.

"The five eggs!" Mace announced from the doorway.

"Don't come in," exclaimed her mother. "Lucile's dress isn't like ours to be squeezed up; it calls for space. Lucile had better stay in her bed after this till we call her. The only way to learn to be hampered is by long being hampered. Tell your brother good-

by, Mace; he's going to seek his fortune, and for my part I hope he'll find it."

"All the loose ones have been found," old Mrs. Woodney declared; "you have to make 'em these days."

"La—that reminds me to make the corn-bread!" And Mrs. Woodney began stirring into the meal the hot water which everybody had forgotten.

VI

A MATTER OF SOULS

No HERO of olden times ever left his native village horseback with more prospects of difficulties in the seeking of his fortune, or deeper thrills at the excitements to be encountered by the way, than did Robert Woodney on boarding the Westville train that was to start him on his way to New York. The mere act of handing the agent thirty-nine dollars for his ticket was equal to meeting at least two highwaymen at midnight five miles from the nearest inn; and the knowledge that he would be two days and two nights rushing onward with scarce a pause made his courage leap high, as if he had embarked upon a perilous voy-

age of discovery with no hope, for an interminable time, of setting foot upon dry ground.

But though his nervous system was wrought up to its greatest tension, his sensations were pleasanter than those of his loved ones left behind; Robert saw, beyond the almost superhuman difficulties that lay before him, the million dollars that was to reconcile Nellie's father to his suit, but Robert's family could not see that million. As they sat about the evening lamp, tracing his whereabouts on the railroad map, first at St. Louis, then Columbus, Ohio, their voices were low and subdued. Would they ever see him again? Would Robert develop those resourceful qualities calculated to bear him uninjured amongst such frightful pitfalls? No one in Westville had ever been to New York except Lucile, and if she had never

been there, would she have divorced her husband?

No good will come of it, thought Mr. Woodney; and in his evening prayer, fervent were his supplications that Robert might be restored to them in safety and that his soul might not be contaminated by the love of money and the pride of life. To this petition Mrs. Woodney always added a mental postscript to the effect that if Robert were suffered to accumulate just enough without its being too much, to God would be all the glory. Old Mrs. Woodney took what comfort she could in thinking of the Bible she had thrust into Robert's suitcase—with that flag of truce the young Christian soldier was advancing toward the camp of Satan.

"He's there now," Mace announced on the noon of the third day. "His train has just passed under the Hudson River."

Mrs. Woodney seized her husband's hand and held it tenderly and for a while solemn silence reigned in the house.

"To think, just to think," Mrs. Woodney presently murmured with an accent of pride, "that a child of mine has been to Pittsburgh and Philadelphia! And has gone under the Hudson River! And is now in New York City! What high thoughts he must have!"

Mr. Woodney rose, his face serene. "I have committed him to the hands of the Lord," he said quietly. "I shall fear no more."

On that day came the disquieting rumor that Mr. Glenston was opposed to re-employing Mace as teacher in his district. As she had given general satisfaction, the only reason could be Robert's application for Nellie Glenston's hand. Mr. Glenston, it is true, was only one man; but he had

always enjoyed managing the school and controlling the school board. He had little or no education, but it was generally felt that he did not need any—he had so much land; and though himself without learning, he had very definite and extremely positive views as to how learning should be communicated.

"Don't be discouraged, Mace," her father argued. "Doubtless this rumor is unfounded. I shall send word to Mr. Glenston to stop by and see me the first time he is in town, and we will talk over the whole situation."

The family felt that in this instance the minister was too hopeful; if opposed to Mace, he would hardly agree to come to the house, although in no danger of meeting Robert—of course the news of his departure to New York had spread like wildfire. But

in this opinion they failed to do Mr. Glenston justice. Hardly anybody is as bad as he is thought to be, and in spite of all the farmer's faults, it never occurred to him to disregard the summons of the blind minister. Mr. Woodney's helplessness was his strongest weapon.

It happened that when Mr. Glenston left his farm to obey the summons the minister was on his way to his barn, whither he sometimes went to escape the house-flow of conversation, so little calculated to irrigate those fields of thought in which sermon ideas germinate; and when Mr. Glenston finally reached the Woodney cottage the minister was in the midst of a most astonishing adventure. Having addressed a few words to Bonaparte, whom he supposed lonesome in his strange quarters, he cautiously ascended the ladder to the loft, mildly triumphing in hav-

ing escaped the family's watchful care. For it was as a great delight to him to slip away without guidance, as it was to his children to guide him.

He had scarcely reached the pile of hay on which he intended to nourish his ideas when a coarse and threatening voice sounded within a foot or two of his ear, "Just you come another step and I'll knife you!"

Mr. Woodney stopped as if petrified. "Who are you?" he asked in amazement.

"Oh," said the brutal voice, "you don't know, do you! You didn't come here after me, I guess! Oh, no! Just you move one of them hands if you want to feel how sharp and slick and clever my knife is."

"My friend," said Mr. Woodney, aghast, "these are very wicked words. I had no idea any one was in the loft, and I have no notion who you are. As you may see, I am

perfectly blind, and your intelligence should tell you that I am absolutely harmless."

"Then what are you coming up here for? And how comes it that you walked a beeline right over here where I was hid behind the hay?"

"I came up here to meditate upon next Sunday's sermons, and I wished to repose upon the hay while I meditated."

"And you got no notion who I am?"

"I think I have never heard your voice before."

"Don't you talk to me in that ambiguous style. Ain't you got no suspicion who I am? Ain't you read the papers? Don't you know *nothing?* Come! You mean to tell me that after all my exploits you've no inkling as to what a character I am?"

"Not the slightest."

The ruffian uttered an exclamation partly

of relief, yet, oddly enough, betraying a certain disappointment that his fame should be so circumscribed. "Now look here, governor, we've got to come to an understanding. Sit on that hay; you say it's what you came for, and I'll sit by you with my knife handy. If you holler, you're a dead 'un. Look here, I'm hiding in this loft, and I don't want to hurt nobody. But if I am ketched up with it means the penn for me—ten years, fifteen, twenty—maybe a lynching, owing to the moral training of your community. See? Well, governor, I put it to you as a man that seems to be fair-minded and open, would you let yourself be lynched or shut up in prison for ten or twenty years if you could hide in a barnloft till the bloodhounds was past? You wouldn't. Neither would I. You and I are sensible men and we ain't going to let ourselves be took. Now,

if you hadn't found me up here you wouldn't be in this. Blind gents oughter stay in the house. But you've found me, and like enough you'll soon learn who I am. Then there's the reward. You'll want that reward. It ain't but human nature to claim it. I'd want it in your place. But you see, if you get that reward it means that all's up with me. They ain't nothing we puts before a reward. One man does one thing and another does another. You tell me you preach; well, I—well, I do what *I* do. But each and every one of us acts this way or that to get money."

"No, no," exclaimed Mr. Woodney fervently. "You entirely misunderstand——"

"If we sit still, the birds won't feed us," continued the hoarse voice. "We move about; it's to get victuals. There's plenty of wealth in the world, and life is give us to

get it. So you'll want that reward. Now, what I'm figgering on is this—how I can let you go back to the house and feel myself safe? I can't. Yet if I keep you here, what'll happen? They'll come hunting you. But it goes agin me to stick you with my knife, you so quiet and peaceful like. I'm a desperate man; I reckon you have saw but very few desperate men, ain't you? And yet even me wouldn't want to kill a sheep when I wasn't hungry for mutton. Nevertheless, we've got to come to an understanding immediate, and if you can shed any light on my difficulty speak quick. I mean fair by you and would make all allowances I could for your being blind, but they ain't no fair-minded man in the world that would think I ought to turn you loose to compass my everlasting ruination."

"This is a difficult situation for me," said Mr. Woodney meditatively.

"I guess yes!" growled the voice.

"And yet," pursued the other, "I think I see my way clear. I must respect the laws as the powers that be. You are evidently an escaped criminal and justice calls for you; yet I know nothing of your name or condition. I have no evidence against you but your own words, which particularize no specific actions. Yet it is possible that before long I may hear all about you. Would it not then be my duty to give you up to the powers that be? So it would seem. And yet, my friend, a greater obligation rests upon me; while you are enjoying my hospitality may I not be inspired from on high to touch your heart to the salvation of your soul? If I err in thinking of your eternal welfare before the rights of the state, surely God,

whom I serve, will forgive my zeal in His behalf. This, therefore, is what I will do: I will preserve your secret as my own life, and I will bring you the message of Christ crucified."

"Not for me," interposed the man with an oath. "No preaching for mine!"

"In that case, we must trust to chance; I may never discover who you are and what you have done; but if I may not do my duty for your spirit, I could not keep silent should I learn who and what you are."

"You ain't said nothing about that reward."

The blind face was suddenly illuminated in a manner so bright and strange that the ruffian blinked his eyes. "My friend, all the gold of Alaska is nothing to the joy of telling of God's love."

"This is a rummy go!" muttered the other.

"My friend, have you been here long? You must be hungry. I will bring you food, though it will be very difficult, since I scarcely rise from my chair that three or four do not begin contending who is to lead me about—bless their hearts! My son is in New York now; he is a brave lad—there are only women in the house; you will have nothing to fear. I do not see why you should not stay in this loft indefinitely, and whenever I can I'll slip in to pay you little visits. There is one trouble; we are very poor, and every cold biscuit is numbered; but I'll compass it somehow. Doubtless I can slip one in my pocket at table, though it will be hard for me to know when all eyes are averted."

"See here, governor, saddle me for an ass if you don't strike me as putting across about the straightest talk I ever heard. I'm going to do what I ain't done since I was a

kid, and that is to trust a man, which I mean you. I can't look in your eye, but dinged if I can't see right into your heart and through to the other side. You can go scot free, reverend, and rustle me some grub when the land's quiet, for I'm about half starved, that's no dream. Give us your hand. You see I ain't been brung up against many of your cut and style, and I never knowed of no preaching before where they didn't pass the basket. It'll go agin the grain, but you can talk to me about my soul till you make it holler."

The man's voice suddenly altered. "Hey! I can see through a crack in the wall that a man's coming down this way from the house."

"Possibly it's brother Glenston—I sent for him on business—I'll stop him before he gets into the barn and take him back to the house."

VII

BONAPARTE'S RETURN

MR. WOODNEY descended the ladder with remarkable agility, but just as he reached the barn door it opened.

"Pardon me," exclaimed Mr. Woodney, recognizing the squeak of the hinges, "is that you, brother Glenston? We will go at once to the house, for we cannot stay here." He heard a footstep within the door. "We mustn't remain here," he insisted eagerly. "This is no place for us."

"What do I see?" ejaculated the voice of Mr. Glenston. "What! What *do* I see?"

Mr. Woodney clasped his hands in despair, supposing that the farmer had caught a glimpse of the fugitive in the loft.

Glenston looked at the minister with flashing eyes, and believed he gazed upon the impersonation of guilt, for in truth the minister was greatly embarrassed.

"So!" cried Glenston. "So! You have him here, brother Woodney! Could I have believed it? Could I have thought it possible? Nothing but my own eyes could have convinced me of this—this—this outrage!"

"How—how did you know he was here?" Mr. Woodney faltered.

"I did not know it. I never dreamed that such was the case. But my own eyes——"

"Then it is my duty to warn you," said the minister quickly, "that he is dangerous. In heaven's name say nothing about it."

"Say nothing about it? On the contrary, I shall blazon it to the four corners of the county. Poor Baldy, poor Baldy! Yes, yes, *I* will take you home!"

Bonaparte uttered an affectionate neigh.

Mr. Woodney was too bewildered at the other's words, and particularly at his accusing tones, to grasp the truth. "What are you going to do?" he asked, hearing Mr. Glenston entering Bonaparte's stall.

"If you must know, sir, I am going to take my horse home. I dare say you didn't send for me to do this; in fact, I remember how determined you were to prevent my entering the barn. I shall pay no attention to your entreaties to keep this matter secret. Far be it from me to accuse you of stealing my poor old family horse that has been turned out in his old age for more than a year. But your son—ah, your son! And you must have connived at his crime—your attitude betrays you, your strange act in forbidding me to enter—your wild words—'dangerous,' indeed, my poor old Baldy!"

"Sir, you are utterly mistaken. My son purchased that horse of a mover—a gypsy who was driving through the country. Were he here——"

"Oh, no doubt; but fortunately for him, he's in New York. Yes, yes, Baldy, you shall be safe in your meadow now that Master Robert Woodney is far, far away. And so he bought my old horse of a camper, did he? You don't think it odd that your son should work on my farm for months and not know the old family horse, eh?"

"My son has not the farmer's eye," said Mr. Woodney. "When we kept a cow he ofttimes drove up the neighbor's instead of our own."

"Yes, I dare say he did! Well, good-by, brother Woodney. Come, Baldy, follow your old master. Thirty years he has served us, brother Woodney, and if you'll excuse

me, I'd not like to see him worked in his last days, nor traded off, as you may have meant to do. Mind you, sir, I do not say you *knew* that this horse was stolen; you may even have believed Master Robert's cock-and-bull story about buying it from a camper. But I do say that your actions and your words this day have been somewhat remarkable; though most remarkable of all is poor old Baldy's presence in your barn. You might tell Miss Mace, sir, that we have another teacher on our string. Baldy—old fellow—step along, Baldy. Good morning, brother Woodney. By the way—" he called back, "my lawyer will call about the mortgage. I can't do without my interest any longer, and no doubt people who can send their children to New York and keep their barns full of horses will not mind such a trifle as two years' back pay. My lawyer

will see you—with an ultimatum. I suspect you'd better be looking about for a house to rent. Good day, brother Woodney, I am sorry for *you.*"

"One moment, brother Glenston, just one —my son is as honest a lad as ever lived—just one moment——"

"Yes, brother Woodney, just one moment for a hint: I doubt if your influence will be the same after this criminal conduct on Master Robert's part. As a member of the church board I should feel it my duty to suggest a change of pastors. But I will not try to prevent you from securing a church elsewhere. Good morning, brother Woodney; I wish you well."

Before Mr. Woodney reached the house he had been missed, and at the back porch he was met by the family, uneasy lest he

might have wandered among the scattered snares of the woodpile.

"Here he is, safe and sound!" cried old Mrs. Woodney. "Benjamin, where *have* you been?"

"Didn't I see Mr. Glenston leading our Bonaparte away?" asked Mrs. Geraldine. "It must have been Bonaparte from his gait —then how can you look so downcast? Don't be afraid to tell how little he brought; we'll be grateful for the merest pittance."

"Bonaparte has brought more than you can imagine," returned the minister, stepping heavily upon the porch, and surrendering his hand to Mace to be led to the front room.

"Did he say anything about my school?"

"My poor Mace!"

For a moment or two there was silence, then Mace said bravely, "Don't you worry,

father; I'll put in an application somewhere else. It'll be late, but it nearly always happens that some teacher marries or moves away at the last moment. There are other schools besides Mr. Glenston's."

"That's my brave doughter. The clouds are pretty heavy just now, but the sun shineth. And we must give up our home; houses are so scarce in Westville we must look about at once for one to rent."

Another silence, somewhat longer; then Mrs. Geraldine Woodney remarked, "That Hidgins house is only eight dollars a month, and I guess it would hold us. It has better screen windows than we ever had—and there isn't any barn, either. I'll throw on my sunbonnet and run over there right now; that is, Benjamin, unless you have some more cheerful news for us."

"I have more news, my dear. I have as

good as lost my church in Westville. The board votes as brother Glenston, you know, and he wants another man."

"So much the better!" cried Mrs. Geraldine; "then we needn't rent a house in this place at all. We'll simply seek another church where they have a parsonage, and where they could hardly have an old brother Henry to sleep through your sermons and take two hours of your Sunday afternoons in arguing against the Mormons. And as Mace isn't to teach here, everything will fit in beautifully."

"And Bonaparte is gone," added old Mrs. Woodney drily; "why need we linger here?"

Mace laughed, then wiped the gathering tears from her eyes.

"The worst is to come," the minister sighed. "All this, as you say, is nothing. It belongs to this temporal life with its ills and

cares. But, my dears, the shadow of dishonor rests on Robert—for that horse was the old family Glenston animal, and brother Glenston firmly believes that Robert stole it. To make matters worse, I tried my best to keep brother Glenston from getting into the barn. I almost used physical violence to keep him out, little dreaming that our Bonaparte was his Baldy."

"But Robert bought that horse of a camper," cried Mace, her eyes flashing. "And if he were here he could prove it. Couldn't we do something to Mr. Glenston for saying such an awful thing?"

"Yes, we could!" exclaimed Lucile, rising with burning cheeks, and taking all the Woodney sorrows upon her shoulders. "That's what they call libel in the law courts. It's horrible for anybody to say such things about Robert—as fine and clean-hearted a

boy as ever lived, so upright and handsome, and as innocent as a baby. I'll not stand this, if the rest of you can. Robert a thief! It makes my blood boil. I know what it all means. Mr. Glenston is so enraged to find that his daughter loves Robert and Robert means to win her that he will go any lengths to drive you from Westville. He knows Robert couldn't steal—he couldn't know Robert without knowing that. We'll compel him to retract that charge."

"My dear, my dear," remonstrated Mr. Woodney gently, "we must not go to law. No doubt Robert's innocence will be shown in due time. But at present——"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mrs. Geraldine; "so our barn was Bonaparte's Elbe, not his St. Helena! Let him have his Hundred Days! At present I must read you the first notice of my book, just come from the clip-

ping bureau. No doubt that book will set everything right. Listen—it's from a regular magazine and in big type, Benjamin, with the name of the book in black letters. You've told us some bitter things; but there's always a little sweetness to stir into the bitterest sorrow." She read: "'The last of all, *Thresvire,* by Mrs. Geraldine Woodney, is a novel of something like 400 pages and can go through the mails for 12 cents postage. This we are informed by the publishers' advertisement, and we have verified the claim. The publishers are correct in making this statement. As a matter of fact there are 887 pages, and its weight calls for exactly 12 cents in postage stamps. The publishers make various other claims for the book which we have not been able to verify because we cannot understand the work. We do not know what it is all about, and we know not

why *Thresvire*. The jacket announces in flaming letters that the characters in the book are "People just like Us." It may be so, for who knows himself? This is the first novel by Mrs. Geraldine Woodney. Should she survive the writing of *Thresvire* we hope her next will not be about "People just like Us." If *Thresvire* is like Us, the author is failing in the art of making Us see ourselves as others see Us.' "

"Infamous!" cried Lucile. "One would think that Mr. Glenston had written that! Some impertinent young reporter, trying to be smart at the expense of genius, for so much per column."

"Why, Lucile!" expostulated Mrs. Geraldine. "Look—it is published in Boston; and there are sixteen lines of it. You don't realize what it means for my name to appear twice in a magazine of that kind. And the

name of my book—see; it occurs four times. That will stamp it upon the public attention —and the public, mind you, of *Boston, Massachusetts.*"

"It seems very unkind," said Mace doubtfully.

"But see how much space is given to it," retorted her mother. "Here is a notice of a book written by one of the most popular writers of the day. There are only four lines—it is merely called 'another masterpiece.' Now, there are sixteen lines about *Thresvire.* Anybody might overlook that brief note about the 'masterpiece,' but nobody who glanced at the page could fail to discover that Mrs. Geraldine Woodney had written a book."

"And what good would it do 'em," inquired old Mrs. Woodney, "and what good would it do *you?*"

"All the good in the world. You never buy a book you've never heard of. First you must know there *is* such a book. Then there is a possibility of your buying it. This notice is a great streak of luck for us, let me tell you! It doesn't matter whether a book is praised or found fault with; but it does matter if it isn't mentioned. That's what kills a book—not to mention it."

"Well, then," said Mace, "I guess we ought to be glad."

"*Let* us be glad!" returned her mother. "As for Robert, we must get a letter off to him at once and get full particulars of his ill-advised purchase. If he buys horses in New York his day there will be short."

"My dears," said the minister, folding his hands, "no matter how discouraging affairs may appear, we never get together and talk them over that they don't grow light upon

our hearts. The powers of evil may threaten and the breakers roar, but nothing can break through the charmed circle of our love. I'm no longer blind when I hear you making nothing of my mountains—see how your faith has removed them! Let us go forward," he cried, lifting his arm as if to point the way. "We'll follow our Pillar of Fire."

Mrs. Woodney slipped her arm about his neck.

"Who is this?" asked the minister, feeling her hair.

"The one with the best right," returned the other; "the celebrated author of the book that's about people just like Us." She kissed him. "Forward!" she exclaimed, trying to laugh. "Here's our captain!"

VIII

MOLASSES AND COALOIL

Miss Lucile Vizzingham—formerly Mrs. Frank Petterly—had been two weeks with the Woodneys before she hit upon a plan of helping them out of their accumulated difficulties. Her desire from the first had been to act the part of their guardian angel, and just as angels do not accomplish their beneficent work by means of money, so Lucile wished to aid her relations without diminishing her income. Also, as angels do not bless a household by performing menial labors, it had never occurred to Lucile to turn a hand toward preparing meals, sweeping floors, or making beds. She had lived so long in the city, in the midst of

luxuries—the greatest of which, perhaps, consisted of servants, male and female—that for all she knew a bed renewed itself as if it belonged to the vegetable kingdom, blossoming afresh every day. She saw Mace sweep the rooms while Mrs. Woodney, with her manuscript, retreated, foot by foot, before the dust; sometimes placing her feet on the rounds of her chair to be cleaned around, sometimes fleeing to the porch to leave a free field, but Lucile did not put her thoughts upon that broom. She was engaged with large plans; of such details as dish-washing she thought nothing, even when in the room where it was in progress.

Lucile was a prominent member of various civic clubs, clubs that did large things, from elucidating Browning to emancipating her sex; and it was large things that she de-

signed for the Woodneys. The longer she stayed with them, the less she grew like herself, the more like them; and now, after two weeks, she had reached the heroic resolution of helping them with her own means. Although Lucile, in the eyes of Westville, was a rich woman, she never had as much as she wanted to spend on herself; therefore the change wrought in her heart was revolutionary. For years she had suffered from selfishness to such an extent that she had been quite blind from it—as blind in her way as Mr. Woodney in his. The family atmosphere had brought a partial clearing to her vision; she had begun to see things, and some of these things, though rising out of rather bewildering mists, lifted their peaks above the every-day world of self-interest. She still thought the mountains were created to hold

the gold mines, but she had begun to discover sun-lighted, heaven-kissed heights far above the realms of metals and precious stones.

What it was in the Woodney family that moved her so profoundly she could not have put in words. Partly it was the happiness that prevailed without mad striving to attain it; peace in the face of the storm of adversity —heroic confidence, a calm that reminded her of the undaunted Christians waiting in the arena for the attack of wild beasts. But that was not all, not even the greater part; the interdependence of one upon the other, the harmony that made the family a unit, a solid force against any enemy—that was more. She thought that it would have been impossible rightly to record the life of any in that cottage without blending therewith the lives of the others—even of Robert, far away in New York. And it was so that the

community regarded any Woodney—not as an independent whole, but as a part of all Woodneys. Old Mrs. Woodney held as an asset the youth of Mace and Robert; and great as was the wonder in the town that any one in Westville should have written a book, that wonder was impartially divided among the minister's family. All of them had written that book, all of them wore the crown. Marvelous as this appeared to Lucile, there was something connected with it, stranger still; this was the realization that the Woodneys as a united family were not unique; the other Westville families were also units. If a Porter were touched, all Porters rose in arms; if a Thompson were applauded, all Thompsons rejoiced. Nor was this state of affairs confined to Westville; Westville was merely a small American town; and the Woodneys were merely an American family.

Lucile had missed from her life that which she most passionately craved, yet which seemed the commonest thing in the world. Her vision was now growing sufficiently clear to discover how terribly her view of life had been distorted. Her mad quest of excitement had filled her days and left her heart empty. If she could carry this family over the rocks that threatened to dash their bark to pieces she would feel that though her own married life were wrecked, she had not lost the power to steer among the breakers. It would call for the spending of money; well, in her own way Lucile also would be a heroine—she would spend for others.

That night, just as the family rose from supper, the expressman brought the twelve copies of *Thresvire*—those wonderful first copies donated to the author according to the contract. It had seemed at times that they

would never come; that that clipping denouncing it had been premature; that the publishers might change their minds at the last moment and break the contract and destroy the plates, suffering a great expense by so doing rather than a greater expense by production. But here they were, all twelve, and in an incredibly short time every one held a copy and fled to the front room to admire its cover, its type, its illustrations, and the advertisement of it on the jacket.

The novel appeared in blue cloth; all had hoped it would be red, since red was the author's favorite color; but the instant the packages had been unwrapped and the treasures disclosed every one felt that blue was the thing, that it could have been nothing but blue. The illustrations did not illustrate the story particularly; the heroine looked

like a doll, the hero like a fashion-plate showing handsomely creased trousers and but little intelligence—but there were six of these illustrations, and the inscriptions under them were taken from the text—that text which Mrs. Woodney had written at the table, on the porch, in the barn-loft, on the front steps—wherever she could find room to move her arm. That which most fascinated the eyes of the little group were these words—*"By Geraldine Woodney."*

Mr. Woodney at last said, rather wistfully, "I don't know how long it's been since I've permitted myself to regret the loss of my eyesight. But now—" His lip trembled slightly. He was holding one of the books against his bosom, occasionally feeling the pages.

Lucile sat down by him and said, "Uncle

Benny, you must be proud of this dedication."

"Dedication?" echoed Mr. Woodney; "I didn't know there was any."

Lucile looked quickly at Mrs. Woodney, fearing she had made a mistake. But Mrs. Woodney nodded to her to go on. Not but what every Woodney there would have liked to tell the minister about it, only something in their throats stopped the spoken word.

"Yes," said Lucile, quite calmly—for *she* had not written the book—"there is a Dedication. Shall I read it to you?"

"I wasn't told our book was to have a Dedication," persisted Mr. Woodney, feeling that he had hardly been treated fairly in this instance.

"Here it is, in beautiful script," Lucile told him, still in a matter-of-fact tone. "I'll read it:

'To
My Beloved Husband—
The Eyes of my Spirit,
Through whom my Brightest Visions
Come.' "

Lucile broke down when she reached the last words, and laughed weakly because her sob had come as a surprise to her practical heart.

Mr. Woodney started up. "Where is she?" he called, opening his arms. The distinguished author was eclipsed in a mighty embrace.

"I think," said old Mrs. Woodney, "that we ought to clean up those dishes, for we never leave them over night that company doesn't come."

"There shall be no anti-climax to the Woodneys' Red Letter Day," declared Mrs.

Geraldine, emerging radiantly, "and cleaning dishes is always an anti-climax."

It was at least half an hour later that old Mrs. Woodney was missed from the family group.

"Where can she be?" exclaimed her daughter-in-law. As it happened—and not for the first time, by any means—there was no coaloil in the house except in the lamp about which they were clustered; wherever the old lady was, clearly she was in darkness.

Mace had a suspicion, darted to the next room, then,—"Her apron is gone!"

Mrs. Geraldine Woodney groaned: "She is cleaning those dishes!" She rose. "Come, since it must be. Bring the lamp, Mace. Lay the books away. I cast aside the pen to grasp the tea towel."

Mace led the mournful procession, bearing aloft her light that Lucile, in the rear, might

not wander out of the narrow way and come to grief among chairs, books, trunks and larger pieces of furniture that jealously contended for every plank of floor-space. Sure enough, Mrs. Woodney was bending over the capacious dishpan in which a great pile of dishes soaked in a state of probation, and was selecting one at a time from the ranks to purify it with exceeding care.

"Oh, mother, mother!" sighed Mrs. Geraldine. "Could you not leave us one poor evening on Parnassus?"

The other was apologetic. "I tried my best to do it before anybody found out," she said. "I didn't make the least noise; but somehow this water doesn't seem to do the work."

Mace held the lamp nearer and exclaimed, "Grandmother! You have emptied the glass of sorghum in with the dishes!"

The old lady said faintly, "I *thought* the water was very thick."

"It isn't all in the water, mother," observed Mrs. Geraldine; "there are rivulets of it down your apron. I wouldn't touch myself if I were you."

Mr. Woodney murmured in an indescribable tone of tender gaiety, "Sweet are the uses of adversity."

Everybody laughed at that; everbody except Lucile, who had seated herself in a chair. Lucile always sat down when she came upon a scene of labor, but this time she had not reckoned upon a streak of molasses across the bottom of the chair. She tore herself loose as soon as she could. The old lady, discovering by the light her condition, held out her arms helplessly. "Clean me!" she petitioned, still smiling over her son's humor.

At that moment the doorbell sounded. "Company has come!" exclaimed the old lady, all smiles vanishing; with arms outstretched she was like a prophet of old who has lived to see some plague fulfilled which he had long proclaimed against the children of Israel. "I told you they'd come!"

"Mace," said her mother, "I expect it's your young gentleman friend. Take the lamp. Lead him into Lucile's room—is your bed made up, Lucile?"

"Bed?" echoed Lucile, with her finger in her mouth. "Why, I don't know—I suppose it is."

"Yes," said old Mrs. Woodney, "I know it is, for I made it."

When Mace was gone, "Now, Lucile," said Mrs. Geraldine firmly, "you will have to get us some coaloil, for light we must have. Mother, sit down in a chair and keep per-

fectly still—that chair that Lucile was in; there's no use to have to wash two. We'll clean you to a marvel when Lucile brings the coaloil. Let us not forget that our book is *out.* Happy day!"

"But I don't know where to go," said Lucile, somewhat dazed. "And I wouldn't know what to do. I don't know any of these people."

"Take my arm," said the minister, "and we'll both go; I can direct and you can lead the way. And as our street lamps light nothing but the streets we don't want to travel, your ruined dress won't be seen. Good-by, Geraldine—" he kissed her. "Good-by, mother——"

"Don't come near, son," interposed his mother, hastily. "Good-by, good-by! Don't be uneasy about me." You would have thought the minister was on the eve of a long journey.

IX

LUCILE'S MONEY

WHEN they were outdoors, Lucile addressed Mr. Woodney with some energy:

"And so Mace has a gentleman friend! Tell me about it, Uncle Benny."

As they made their way to the grocery, just around the corner, the minister told about the gentleman friend. He was a gentleman friend very much in love; he was comfortably well-to-do; and, as might be supposed of a young man who has laid by a goodly sum, he was a little worldly wise. He wanted to marry Mace as much as ever; but since the evil reports about that horse, he now made it a condition that Mace go away

with him to parts unknown—that she separate herself from her family. The gentleman friend did not believe that Robert had stolen Baldy and that the minister had connived in the crime. But a good many others did, and he insisted that Mace should leave the murky atmosphere that hovered over her family. It might be more exact to state that Mr. Glenston's friends and relatives hardly thought Robert had intentionally appropriated stolen property, but that they had taken that "side" because they *were* Mr. Glenston's friends and relatives. Mr. Glenston, in his eagerness to separate his daughter from Robert, had made a "side" of the matter; a "side" in the social life of Westville and a "side" in the Rev. Woodney's church.

Mr. Glenston was connected with most of the families in Westville and was far

wealthier than any of them, and if one of this numerous clan had said openly what most of them believed, that Robert was incapable of stealing a horse, such a one would thereby have been taking the "side" of the enemy. Mace's young gentleman friend was not related to Mr. Glenston; but he had no intention of marrying a girl whose brother was under a cloud, and settling in that cloud; and as Mace had no intention of deserting her family in their trouble, it was Mr. Woodney's belief that this visit of the gentleman friend would be his last.

It was a great pity that Robert, when writing from New York, had been vague about the camper from whom he had bought Bonaparte—or Baldy. He could not remember the camper's dress or the color of his eyes and hair. Had he been sent to drive

in that particular camper, his letter suggested that he might have had as hard a time as he used to have in identifying the family cow. That letter had been freely shown, but had not helped Robert's cause.

On their way back from the grocery Lucile broached the plan she had been long revolving.

"Uncle Benny, you must listen to me. Remember that I, too, am a Woodney, and that I am alone in the world, but for my son, who is comfortably provided for in Germany. I have what you would consider a good income, and as long as I stay here I am not spending it. I want to do a little good with my money —and I want to do it for your family. You have insisted on the church's accepting your resignation, and you're right—as long as the most influential members want a change, you can't do anything here. Now, let us all leave

Westville. Mace can marry her gentleman friend and go to the ends of the earth; you'll find a new field, and Robert shall be given a position somewhere—I'll place him."

"No, my dear, we couldn't leave Westville under this cloud."

"But there's no way to clear up the mystery. The people don't really believe these absurd charges; I don't think even that horrid Mr. Glenston believes them in his heart. It's just like politics for some to take the stand they have. And anyway, there's no way to prove the truth. Nobody saw that camper, Robert can't describe him, and even if we knew his name and could produce his photograph, there'd be no way of finding him, or proving him a thief even if we could find him."

"The truth will come out, my dear; the truth will come out."

"My dear uncle, it's impossible."

"I've placed it in the Lord's hands, Lucile; that's why I take everything so calmly. He'll know just what to do, and just when to do it."

Lucile was distressed. "Oh, my poor, poor uncle! The Lord doesn't interfere in the affairs of this world!"

"He'll interfere with brother Glenston," replied the other confidently. "He's never failed me yet."

"Has He ever interfered to keep you from having your house sold, because you can't pay the interest on the mortgage? Has He ever interfered to keep people from calling Robert a thief?"

"Well, my dear, His time is not our time. And I mean to stay in Westville; when He's ready for me He'll find me right here. Sometimes the Lord gets ready for a man

and doesn't find him in the right place. This'll all be cleared up—I don't know how, but I want to be on the ground when the time comes."

There was a pause, then Lucile said abruptly, "Very well; then it's decided that you're to stay here. I mean to stand by you. And, Uncle Benny, you must let me pay off that mortgage, for the house shall not be sold."

"You blessed girl! That's sweet of you—we couldn't let you, but it makes me see light in the darkness to hear your generous offer."

"But you *can* let me—you *must* let me. Oh, Uncle Benny, I've been selfish all my life—let me be generous just once!"

"No, my dear. But all of us thank you from our hearts."

"I don't want the thanks. I want to pay

off the mortgage. And that is what I will do."

"We couldn't let you, Lucile."

"Listen, dear Uncle—if you could know what it has meant to me—seeing you in the midst of your family every day—never a harsh word, never a sneer, never an unkind smile . . . yes, call this a debt I'm paying off, for I shall save your place."

"No, Lucile. I am in earnest when I say we couldn't take it."

"Why?"

"I'd rather not tell you, my dear."

"Uncle Benny, can it be pride?"

"No, my dear, it isn't pride. Shall we take in the coaloil now? Remember, they sit in darkness."

"Just a moment; it won't take but a moment for you to give me your reason. I want you to tell me why, Uncle Benny.

You ought to have a very good excuse to prevent me from doing some good in the world."

He was greatly troubled. "Don't insist, Lucile."

"Yes, I insist. Tell me."

"Well, my dear, when we used to know you we were better off than you in this world's goods."

"Oh—back yonder? Yes, indeed; I hadn't a thing to call my own."

"You are rich to-day, Lucile."

She smiled in the darkness. "Rich! Well—perhaps by Westville standards I am almost rich."

"And this wealth of yours, my dear, this certain income; have I not heard that it is the—the alimony?"

"Well?"

"Well, my dear, our home is not to be re-

deemed with the price that was paid for the breaking up of a home."

At first Lucile said nothing; then, "Uncle, those are cruel words."

"I am sorry to wound you, dear."

"And they are unjust words."

"If they are, forgive me."

"They are—oh, they are! You don't know, you can't imagine how it was with me and—and with him. There is no discord in *your* family; there was always discord with us. What one of you wants, the others want; he never wanted what I wanted, he was never pleased with what pleased me. We couldn't stay together any longer, not even for our boy's sake. Isn't it better for us to live apart in peace than to live together in galling bonds? It wasn't that we didn't care for each other. I know he liked me and I know that I—that even to-day—it wasn't

that. We couldn't *agree.* I didn't make him give the alimony. It was his wish. Uncle, it's been like heaven, living in your midst—the heaven that was denied my own life."

"My dear, you say Frank never wanted what you wanted; did you want what he wanted?"

"Never—not from the first month of our married life."

"That explains your failure. Geraldine likes novels; well, my dear, I never read novels, except in her manuscripts. I have grave doubts about works of fiction doing much good, though I firmly believe hers will do no harm. Geraldine is not of the intensely religious type. She hardly ever opens a book of homiletics on my shelf, and I think never peruses one except for my benefit; but each enjoys to the full the en-

joyment of the other in his work. I love Frank Petterly—and you know I love you. I think you love each other. Sacrifice of self is the old-fashioned way, my dear, and it leads back to the old-fashioned days when there were not so many divorces. If you should go to Frank——"

"Oh, Uncle Benny! *I* go to *him?* How utterly impossible!"

"—And should say to him, 'My husband, you are my head, and I freely submit myself into your hands, that you may rule over me as the Holy Word ordains—lo, and behold! Frank would say—for I think I know Frank Petterly—Frank would say——"

The kitchen door was opened. "Do I hear voices?" called Mrs. Woodney. "Is that my darling who has stayed away so long?"

Mr. Woodney stroked Lucile's hair.

"He'd say something very much like that, I am sure," he murmured. "And after that, if you came with the offer to redeem the mortgage, I would say, 'Surely the Lord has sent you!' "

X

THE SECOND GUEST

ONE day in the early part of September a wagon backed up to the Woodney porch, and the driver began hauling a large trunk out upon the doorsteps. Old Mrs. Woodney, the only member of the family who chanced to be at home, came to the door in some agitation. "What does this mean?" she demanded; "we are not expecting company."

"You are the preacher Woodney, ain't you?" retorted the drayman, never pausing in his herculean task of hoisting the immense burden to the porch floor. "I'm told he lives here. I was paid to bring this trunk to

Preacher Woodney's and that's where I've brought it."

"Who paid you?"

"I knowed nothing of him but the color of his money and the color was O. K. This trunk was put off the train at Littleville; the man is riding through in his auto and I reckon he'll be along some day. I've brought it over from Littleville, and now my part is ended. Good-day, missis."

All day and night, all the next day and the day after that the mysterious trunk blockaded the way to the front door. Great was the speculation it excited in the Woodney family. Of all, Lucile was the most indignant at the coming of another guest. Where could she be housed? What would they do with her? And why had she come without sounding a warning note? The very

plagues of the viols of wrath had been withheld until an angel had sounded his trumpet. It was too much. Moreover, there was something so big and imposing in the trunk's appearance, something so sinister in its air of lording it over the front porch—who knew but it contained some infernal machine, bricks of dynamite intended to blow the Woodneys from the midst of those who distrusted them? Twice during this period of unrest old Mrs. Woodney made the announcement that she "smelled something," which was always understood to portend danger of the house being set on fire from some secret, insidious, smoldering rag or paper; twice had the family scattered in search of that which the old lady smelled, sniffling the air as they went, like hounds upon the scent; and on both occasions it was

the ominous trunk that they first tested with their noses.

Old Mrs. Woodney was again alone when a strange footstep upon the porch warned her of the coming of a stranger. On opening the door she saw a handsome man of forty, dressed unlike Westville, with his hand on the trunk as if caressing a faithful horse.

He seemed very glad to see the old lady, and advanced with outstretched hand. "I don't believe you know me!" he exclaimed.

"No," said the other drily, "neither do I know your trunk. I am Mrs. Woodney, the daughter of General Peter——"

"And I am Frank Petterly," cried the other gaily, "who married your granddaughter, Lucile. It must be ten years since we've met, but you seem very little changed."

She was at once plunged into the trough

of two high, conflicting emotions. "Oh, Frank, Frank, how glad I am—you are so big—you look so fine! But it won't do at *all.* It won't do *at* all, Frank. It can't *be!*"

"What can't be, dear grandmother?"

"You mustn't be here, you know. There—it won't do at all."

"Uncle Benjamin's house *is* small," he murmured, looking at the room, then at his trunk. "Is it filled up?"

"It's perfectly full and running over. But I don't mean that. Oh, Frank, why couldn't you have come when *she* was away. But now—but you see, Lucile is staying with us—has been here about three months, and I reckon means to live and die with us, for I've not seen the first move toward her leaving."

"Oh!" said Frank Petterly, starting back. "Is she here now?"

"Nobody's at home just now—but she'll come at four and—you see, dear Frank, it won't do."

He stiffened as he leaned against the trunk. "I don't know why. I made no objection when Lucile wanted the divorce; but I didn't agree to get clear off the earth. Dear grandmother, I'm so sick for a little glimpse of home life that I've left everything in the care of my assistant, and I've come down here to be with Uncle Benjamin a little while. I'm just starved for the kind of love that fairly goes to waste in his family. If Miss Vizzingham is here, I can't help it. If my presence annoys her, let her go back to her gay life in the city—that's what she cares for, anyway. How could she stand it in this village three months? At any rate, she's been here long enough, and now let me have my turn at Uncle Benjamin. I'll have

my trunk taken to the hotel, and I'll room there; but for about two weeks I mean to stay as close to Uncle Benjamin's side as he'll let me; and a man can get mighty close to Uncle Benjamin."

"Come right in, Frank," cried the old lady. "It's fair that you should have a share in my son. And he's pure gold, Benjamin is—Lucile's stock in him won't make your share less valuable."

They were presently seated side by side in the front room, and he felt queer as he looked about at various trifles of dress and ornament that he knew to be those of "Miss Vizzingham." There was a breath in the air that seemed Lucile's breath, and it was untainted by city atmosphere. In this real home she had found a nest, she who had never made for him a real home. His old wound smarted painfully, causing him to

speak in quick, nervous phrases as if to drive back unwelcome thoughts.

"I found the barn empty," he said, "and I backed my automobile into it from the alley; I know Cousin Benjamin won't object because I was told he hasn't a horse. I asked if he kept one and I was answered oddly enough. I don't know what the fellow meant, but he was positive that the barn was empty."

Then old Mrs. Woodney told him all about Robert and Baldy, *alias* Bonaparte. "It'll never be possible to prove that Robert bought the horse of a camper," she lamented, "for Robert wouldn't know the camper if he saw him, and you can't blame the camper for not coming forward—like enough he's a thousand miles from here, anyhow. But Benjamin—well, you know Benjamin; he just thinks the Lord'll make everything

clear, and he won't leave Westville—says we must live down the last lingering suspicion. This house was sold at the courthouse steps, but Lucile bought it and we're renting it of her. Our book doesn't pay its first royalties for three months longer, and they say it isn't selling *very* extensively, though Mrs. Sarah Plemmins says she saw a copy in a store when she was in Kansas City. She told the clerk she knew who wrote the book. I expect he was never more surprised, for you don't see a person every day who knows an author. You can't tell how much the royalties will be," she continued, with the knowing air of one who lives close to Literature. "There were a thousand copies exempted, and so, if a thousand and one are sold, she'll get just exactly thirteen and one-half cents. But we're already paid for writing the book—just being the only

author that was ever seen in Westville is uplifting."

"I can't understand why Miss Vizzingham lingers in this village," protested Frank Petterly, speaking the name with exceeding bitterness.

"She wants to be a blessing; she's crazy to be; and I must say her efforts are bearing fruit. When Mace lost her school through the wicked stories told by that Glenston man, Lucile said she must start a summer school, the kind never held before in Westville, a pay school, and exclusive. It was no attraction to give it out as a pay school, but when it was advertised as 'exclusive' everybody wanted to be in it. There's a big division in town over Robert and the horse. We've got some mighty good friends here, Frank. Everybody that ever had a grudge against the Glenston man can't do enough

for *us*, just to show how they *hate* him. All of them are sending their children to our private school, and the enemies are sending, too, not to be outdone in being exclusive. Why, all told, my dear Frank, I reckon there are at least twenty-seven pupils; yes, and I wouldn't be surprised if the number wasn't swelled to thirty before the public school opens."

"But what part has Miss Vizzingham in this, aside from suggesting the idea?"

"Well, sir, when Lucile first proposed it, poor Mace was so downhearted—she'd sent her gentleman friend about his business because he wasn't stiff enough about the horse—that she wouldn't turn a finger. And my son was dubious about acting for himself, as it seemed to him not to be leaving enough of the burden on the Lord. Well, Lucile didn't tell us; but what must she needs do

but go to every house in the village, tramp to every house within five miles, and explain her exclusiveness scheme! There's one thing this school has that goes ahead of anything the natives had known; it's a class in Expression. Lucile is the teacher of the Expression class. Well, when she told 'em there'd be an Expression class they didn't know what she meant, so she'd say, 'Do you want to know?' and they'd say, 'Yes,' and she'd get right up and give them a piece—you know what I mean, one of these raving kind with hand-claspings, and getting down on one knee, and the arms going all the time, and the voice working on a strain. Lucile teaches that class five days in the week. And Geraldine gives a lecture on how to write books; and Benjamin has a Bible class—and I stay here, 'tend to the dishes, and keep things running. And in the

meantime there's Robert, 'way off in New York, carving out his fortunes—we hear from him every week, and he's always hopeful."

"All this sounds utterly unlike—unlike Lucile!" declared Frank in grave wonder. "She is staying here in order to *work?* But what about her relaxations—her amusements?"

"Oh, all of us relax when the work hours are over. Amusements? I reckon you never heard such laughter—such gaiety—all of us, you know; sometimes I get fairly ashamed of myself, for it seems like I *can't* remember how old I am in the midst of such joy and hopefulness and love; and as for troubles, there's not a dark corner in our home for them to crouch in!"

"I know—I know all about you and yours; but that isn't like Lucile. I never knew Lucile to be satisfied with anything—

well, yes, if she got it up herself, she might be; and as she got up this school, that explains the miracle, I suppose. For it's a miracle for her to be contented."

"Well, Frank, if Lucile is satisfied with her own ideas, it would have been a good thing for you if you'd let her get up something herself in your life!"

"There's no use going back to that, grandmother. But so far as that's concerned, Lucile always did exactly as she pleased. *I* never hindered."

"But I suppose you always showed her you disapproved, didn't you?"

"She never got much comfort out of *me* in her foolish schemes," he admitted. "She wanted to fritter her life away in society and I just let her go ahead. Besides, she never did have any plan like this school idea. It was all nonsense and waste of time and nerve force."

"She'd never have thought of this school plan if she hadn't found how much it was needed. I think Expression is the only thing in the world that the poor girl can do, but she does know how to express, in a truly noble manner. Maybe you never showed her how much you needed her work; maybe if she'd known of your needs she'd have come to *your* aid."

"I don't ask anybody to come to *my* aid," said Frank inflexibly. "If people don't of their own free will and love come to me, then they can just—" He waved his hand impatiently. "But I've come to forget all that, aunt; please don't bring it back."

"I won't say any more, Frank. And if staring at Lucile in her own flesh and blood don't bring it all back, I can promise you a respite while you're staying at the hotel and living with us."

XI

HOME ATMOSPHERE

SOON after four o'clock they came back from the union church, where the school was held, and Mrs. Geraldine whispered to her husband in dismay that she recognized Frank Petterly on the porch. There he stood in the most conspicuous place, determined to show that he had as much right to be at Uncle Benjamin's as anybody. His pleasure at seeing the Woodneys was almost aggressive. Mace was much disturbed on learning the name of the handsome stranger of the waving handkerchief, and wondered vaguely if her Cousin Lucile and her Cousin Frank should be introduced to each other.

But Mr. Woodney was unqualified delight. The honor of leading him by the hand had passed by succession that evening to Lucile; and now, still holding to her, he held out his other hand, crying brightly, "Where are you, Frank, my dear boy? I rejoice to find you here—and here is your wife——"

"Benjamin!" cried old Mrs. Woodney, reprovingly.

Frank grasped Mr. Woodney warmly by the hand. The minister said, "Speak to each other, my dears."

"Well, Lucile," said Frank Petterly, "how do you do?"

"I am perfectly well," replied Lucile, "and I hope you are the same."

"Thank goodness!" murmured Mrs. Geraldine.

"Let us all go in and have a good old-

fashioned family talk," cried the minister, holding each of his guests by a hand. "Mother," he added, "where are you, mother?"

She gave him her position by a slight clearing of the throat, which at the same time suggested the awkwardness of Frank and Lucile sitting down together.

"Well, mother, I've good news for you. Our school paid in a sum to-day that wipes out our very last debt. Thank God, we are just even with the world now!"

"And I have news almost as good," Mace declared, as all went into the house. They were so uplifted to find that Frank and Lucile could endure each other's company without the least restraint, or, indeed, as if finding such proximity unusual, that they stepped as on air. "What do you think has happened? Nellie Glenston has married old

Mr. Snopper, the rich farmer whose farm is just next to Mr. Glenston's!"

"Good Fathers Alive!" ejaculated old Mrs. Woodney, sinking into a chair.

"And *now*," her daughter-in-law told her, "Robert can come home, as there's no use for his fortune!"

"Aunt Geraldine says," added Lucile, "that Robert won't mind so very much as soon as he gets used to the idea."

"No," observed Mrs. Geraldine; "Nellie Glenston was merely a habit to Robert. Anything that keeps him from hard, steady work will be grateful to Robert, even if it's a Mr. Snopper. And I fear the poor boy has had to work very hard in New York."

The minister said devoutly, "The Lord ordereth all things for the faithful."

"Nellie would never have suited Robert,"

cried Mace. "I am utterly unable to understand what he saw in her so attractive."

"And her father would have suited him still less," remarked old Mrs. Woodney. "Well, this is a blessed day! The time to find out whether people are going to suit or not is before they are matched."

"Mother!" warned Mrs. Geraldine. Everybody at once thought of Frank and Lucile, who moved in their chairs uncomfortably.

The old lady exclaimed hastily, "Frank has put his auto in the barn."

Her purpose was so sincere in trying to change the subject and cover her tracks that there was a moment's silence while the family considered the possibilities of success. But the words rang in their ears at such variance from what had gone before that the attempt was judged futile; and the next

moment everybody was laughing except the old lady, who looked very serious indeed.

The evening was spent happily at the Woodney cottage; Frank Petterly took supper with the family, drinking in to the depths of his thirsty soul that atmosphere of home life which had been denied him; and when he and Lucile were left alone in the front room for a few moments, evidently from a conspiracy of the Woodneys, they took advantage of it without the least embarrassment to speak of the simple souls each loved. In particular they commented on the gravity that always settled upon Mace after she had joined in the general laugh or smile. It was plain that it had cost her no little to dismiss her gentleman friend, and that, despite her loyalty to her family, she was constantly thinking of him.

"I can't say that I blame that fellow,"

said Frank, who had heard every detail of the story. "Here's at least a third of the town suspecting that her brother has disgraced them all."

"And I don't blame Mace," Lucile declared. "She *ought* to have sent him away if he isn't willing to take all the family when he takes her."

"Oh, as for that, you and I know that Robert couldn't have committed the sin. And from what I've heard of Baldy, he wouldn't tempt a man fairly steeped in the spirit of kleptomania. But we've got to prove that Robert is innocent. It won't get him that Nellie Glenston, as she's already appropriated, but it'll bring back Mace's lover."

"And suppose it does!" cried Lucile scornfully. "Will she take him after his lack of faith in her brother?"

"I believe she will, for you can see her gay spirits are all assumed; she's really heart-broken. Let him come back, when Robert is exonerated—let him come back. on his knees, and Mace——"

"On his knees!" echoed Lucile, smiling skeptically. "No matter how mistaken one's lover may be, does he ever come back on his knees?"

Frank suddenly stiffened as if he had stepped into a freezing stream. Did she think he had in the remotest degree been thinking of *himself—himself,* who had never been to blame in any of their disagreements? Did Lucile imagine that he had the shadow of a dream of getting on *his* knees? Not while he was Frank Petterly! He smiled that unyielding smile she knew so well, that grim, inflexible wreathing of the handsome

lips that had always goaded her to further rebellion.

But now she looked into his face quite calmly; what was that smile to her, since they were no longer bound together? He had expected her to flare up, to answer his smile with the flashing steel of her eyes, as in the old days—and at sight of her amused calm was sadly discomfited. His smile vanished blankly—it called for a different weapon to touch Lucile nowadays.

That night as he lay broad awake in bed at the hotel he said to himself, "She is greatly changed!" He said little else; but he said this, or thought it, times without number: "Greatly changed — greatly changed!" Had she changed sufficiently to become a new Lucile? He wondered.

The next morning he waited until he supposed the teachers had gone to the church

building, then hurried to the Woodney cottage. Mr. Woodney greeted him from the porch——

"Is that your step, Frank? I'm surprised. I knew you'd taken an early ride and I expected you to come chugging up to the gate to carry me off with you."

"So I mean to do, Uncle Benjamin—and as soon as I bring around the car from the barn——"

"But it's not in the barn," interrupted old Mrs. Woodney, showing herself at the farther end of the room with a duster in her hand. "I heard you taking it away about two or three in the morning, and it's never come back."

Frank looked at them in bewilderment. At two or three in the morning he had dismissed thoughts of Lucile and fallen sound asleep. He hurried to the barn—sure enough, the automobile had disappeared!

Some one, according to the old lady—who had a convenient habit of staying awake most of the night and counting the hours—had steered it from its harbor between two and three that morning.

That day and the four following passed not in idle speculation as to what had become of the car, but in desperate but futile efforts to trace it. Telegrams were sent, the telephone lines were kept busy, and explorations were made on horseback to out-of-the way nooks of the county. Not a clew could be found to the car, or to the man who had stolen it. The subject of its disappearance was of such perpetual fascination and efforts to solve the mystery were so permeated with adventure that all Westville awoke to the simple joy of living, while Frank and Lucile were constantly thrown together in a sense of common interest and purposes such as they had not known since their honeymoon.

XII

WELLINGTON

It was Friday evening. Frank Petterly, just back from a futile conference with the sheriff at the county seat, found the Woodneys in a state of blissful relaxation on the back porch. The September breeze was deliciously warm and fragrant, and Frank dropped upon the bottom step at Lucile's feet. He couldn't help it. After a hard week of teaching Expression she was genuinely tired, and in her attitude of perfect abandon on the splintered floor of the old porch he had never found her so charming. To think of Lucile being tired of real work! As he told of his failure to find a trace of

his automobile he looked up into her face oftener than at any other. To be sure, it was an older face than when he had the right to caress its soft hair and rounded cheek, but it seemed to him that this evening it wore a younger look than it had shown for years.

He felt a bitter pang that was not, however, all bitterness. The soft haze of the darkening sky, the V-shaped flocks of wild geese flying high in the blue toward the south, the lowing of distant cattle, barking of dogs, the shrill, brave defiance-cries of unseen cocks, the spinning past the house of buggy wheels, the shouts of children playing hide and seek—and Lucile resting on her elbow on the old porch floor, physically weary but mentally refreshed—all this made Frank's heart tingle and thrill, despair, yet hope. Lucile's foot was within reach—that

little foot which had been a marvel to him before it began dancing away from all his ideals, skimming over the thin ice of conventional pleasures and proving itself too light and airy for the paths he meant to tread. He felt like grabbing that foot now and crying out, "Lucile! Let's start over!"

Would the foot have rested so quietly and undisguisedly near had it known its danger? At any rate, Frank gave not the slightest sign that he meditated such revolutionary action.

It was old Mrs. Woodney—resting just as luxuriously as the others, for she had been in imagination hard at work all week, hearing classes and in every way sharing the nervous strain of her flock—it was old Mrs. Woodney, always keenest in her scent of company, who suddenly exclaimed, "Somebody's coming!" Sure enough, heavy foot-

steps were now heard along the path, eliciting from the rear sighs, smothered groans and impotent lamentations from old Mrs. Woodney, Mrs. Geraldine Woodney, Mace, Lucile and Frank Petterly.

Rev. Benjamin Woodney called cheerfull, "Come around! Come around!" He had not the remotest idea who it was, but there was nothing in his back yard any more than there was anything in the rear of his mental and spiritual domain from which he felt the need of excluding friend or stranger.

The visitor "came around," and for a moment complete silence reigned. Then Mace told her father in a constrained and slightly tremulous voice, "Father, it's Mr. Glenston!" All the family—that is to say, all the family who had seeing eyes—stared at the wealthy farmer in hostile surprise. It was he who could not see who rose with agility

and cried, "Brother Glenston! Is it indeed you?"

"Yes, brother Woodney," came the harsh, well-known voice. "And I know very well I needn't expect a welcome here."

"Not expect a welcome here?" cried the minister in distress. "Where are you?—you can see; take my hand. You have brought much sorrow upon us; it must have made you very unhappy. Has the Lord sent you here to clear away the clouds from our hearts?"

There was a pause, then Mr. Glenston said, speaking with evident effort, "Yes, brother Woodney."

"I knew He would send some one in due time," remarked the minister. "You can clear my son of the last lingering suspicion?"

"I have come to do so."

Everybody was greatly excited except the

minister, and the farmer's eagerness to vindicate Robert was so apparent that much of the hard feeling against him softened as he drew a letter from his pocket.

"I shall read this letter," he said, "and when you have heard it you will know all that I know; it is enough; and I assure you that I shall show this letter, and scatter its contents far and wide—I think it will be best to publish it in our county papers. I now read:

"'Mr. Glenston: You don't know me, and I don't know you, and we ain't likely to meet, at least I hope not. It wouldn't be no pleasure to you and it might be hampering to me. But Parson Woodney can tell you who I am and all about me.'"

"Who is it, Benjamin?" interposed his wife in astonishment.

The minister hesitated. "My dear, I have never mentioned a certain circumstance because—but let's hear the letter."

Mr. Glenston resumed: "*'It was me that stole your old sway-backed, knuckle-kneed, worthless old stack of bones out of your grazing pasture, and it was me that sold it for what I could get to the first green-horn I met on the road. I was driving through the country in my mover's wagon when I saw that monument of past labors and I just took it along as a speculation. After I sold it to a young innocent not far from your place, I drove on to the county seat and sold my wagon and horses, but I had hardly got the money stuffed in my jeans when up comes the sheriff, he having been wired ahead that the horses which I had been driving belonged to somebody up north that was*

after them. I escaped by the skin of my teeth, but they put the bloodhounds on the trail and I guess I would be breaking rock now, or just a past memory, if I hadn't hid in Parson Woodney's barn for three days.' "

"Here in this barn!" cried old Mrs. Woodney in agitation. "I shall never dare go near that barn again after dark."

" *'There was a reward offered of five hundred dollars and all the farmers were scouring the country, you amongst them, dear Mr. Glenston, a-breathing fire and slaughter like that head guy Saul that Parson Woodney told me all about.'* "

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Mace, "what does it mean? Did you talk to that desperado?"

"'I hadn't hardly got scrooched down in the hay in that barn before here comes up the parson, not knowing I was there, he being blind, and for a little while I thought I'd have to give him a still tongue. But by-and-by I tumbled to the fact that Parson Woodney wasn't no man such as you and me and Mr. Smith, but was a sort of glorified angel in pants. When he found out there was a reward for capturing me, it didn't make no more difference to him than if that pile of money was a five-cent bag of salt; what he wanted to do was to talk to me about my soul. And he done the talking all right, and he ain't talked in vain as the writing of this letter indicates. For to write such a long letter as this is the damndest——'"

Old Mrs. Woodney gave a faint scream. "Never mind, mother," said Mrs. Geral-

dine, "you have to get used to words like that when you go in for writing novels."

"Oh, mother!" Mace expostulated, "you wouldn't use a word like that."

"I don't know whether I would or not. You have to be true to nature. If I had a robber in my book, he'd have to rob, and swear, too, likely enough."

"My dear," said the minister, much disturbed, "then pray keep the robbers out of your works."

"Don't you lecture me, you conspirator! Oh, Benjamin! Risking your precious life in the loft with that ruffian! And never breathed a word of it—keeping it a secret from us all—a secret, a secret!"

"My dear, I had to promise secrecy; that was his condition for letting me talk to him of his higher nature. But oh," cried Mr. Woodney with a bland smile, "the difficulty

I had to slip out to him unattended! I almost had to invent excuses—and I really did let you think I was in retreat to prepare my sermons. I hope it was not very wrong. And you missed the food I carried him. My conscience hurt me, my dear, when I was setting all those mouse traps, for I knew that I was the mouse!"

"Geraldine," cried old Mrs. Woodney, severely, "put him in a book! Put him in a book! But go on with that letter, Mr. Glenston; maybe we can find out something more about Benjamin."

"The last word," said Mrs. Geraldine, "was——"

"Geraldine!" cried her mother-in-law.

Lucile interposed. "It won't hurt *me:* damndest—go on, Mr. Glenston."

" *—Hardest work I ever done. To cut*

my tale short like the Irishman's dog, I got out of your part of the country O. K. and since then I've done a good business in my favorite line, though to speak frank I have drawed a line at old family horses; there's very little profit in them and they make trouble. I will say, though, that I was considerable moved by Parson Woodney's talks, and I will say that I wish I was a better man. I was up in the barn loft when I heard you accuse the parson's son of stealing your no-account Baldy and ever since it has weighed on my mind. I've been trying to figure on how to clear him of such foolishness, he being fool enough to buy the beast, but none so much so as to take it unless in that line. I would have wrote right off to explain that I was the party that done the deed, but says I to myself, "Folks might think the boy made up this letter and sent it

himself, and if I don't show my hand, who'll believe in me?" Well, I didn't care to show my hand, not visible.

"'So I've kept studying and studying over this, wanting to help the parson out of his trouble. And at last, although it was as much as my life was worth, I venture back to your State, and to your county, and to your town, praying, like the good parson taught me to pray, that nobody might recognize me, knowing if they did I'd like as not swing from the nearest tree. Now, says I, I've got to make my mark here in some way; then I'll go to distant parts and send back a letter about the horse, and they'll know I've been there and done it, and they'll know it wasn't the parson's son that done the deed.

"'So I comes sneaking round the back alleys, and I creeps into the barn where I

heard so much talk of my soul, which it done it more good than you or I know, no doubt of that; and I gets into the barn and the first thing I sees is a machine standing there. I says to myself, "I'll make my mark on this," I says. So about two or three in the morning I opens up the doors, and cranks up and goes speeding away from Westville, the farther the better, and I goes on and on till daylight, by which time I was afraid the auto might be missed and questions raised. So I branches off into a wood from the main road about forty miles from Westville due south, and I gets out to explore. By-and-by I finds the most deserving nook, a hollow just about wide enough to receive my car. So I runs it into the ravine about half a mile back from the wire fence where nobody would find it and I foots it to the next town, which is Gump Station, and I hikes out for

civilization, where I am now writing to tell you that it wasn't the parson's son that done the deed. Tell the parson he's free to tell all he knows, even to the name I give him, which ain't mine anyhow, for I seen the secret was wearing on him powerful. Tell him I never expects to be in his neighborhood again, but if we never meets again in this world, I know we'll meet in a better one, that is, if there is the two of us there to do the meeting. And sometimes when I sit and get to thinking, maybe beside my campfire along the road, or when lying wrapped up in somebody's barn to keep warm, it comes clear and reasonable to me that there is a heaven, because if there wasn't, where would you put the parson when he's said good-by to this life? And if he's there in heaven a-waiting and a-smiling, ready to hold my hand or even to put his arm about my shoulders as he done

one day—he's blind and couldn't see the look of me—I get to thinking that it might be worth trying for. Which I may. Yours truly, Wellington.

"'P. S. I calls myself Wellington because it was me that done for Bonaparte.'"

XIII

PEOPLE JUST LIKE US

Not long after Mr. Glenston's departure Frank Petterly went to the post-office to mail a letter. As he stood at the desk addressing the envelope, some one stopped within reaching distance of the gummy ink, evidently waiting for him to lay down the wretched Government pen. It was impossible to mark with the pen except by turning it over and bearing heavily on its back, and this Frank did in a leisurely manner, as one who stands upon his rights and yields not an inch for the impatience of unreasonable persons. At last he turned calmly around and gave a start on discovering that the impatient person was Lucile.

"Oh!" said Frank, stepping quickly out of the way, "have I kept you waiting? The pen is a slow-speed pen."

Lucile took the pen rather grimly, but the next moment she laughed; she had shown grimness on recognizing one of Frank's well-known traits, which, not being one of her own, she had always heartily disliked; but on finding that he had not intended exercising this trait upon herself, she was merry.

She said, as she bent her head over the desk and failed to make the mark on her envelope which she had expected to make, "I am about to address a letter to Mace's gentleman friend."

"Very singular!" said Frank Petterly.

"I don't know why you say that," cried Lucile, instantly in arms. "As soon as Mr. Glenston read that letter aloud from the

gypsy I determined to write the whole truth to the gentleman friend, for as soon as he hears it the better for Mace; I know he'll hurry back to Westville; and when he comes it'll matter nothing at all that Mace has lost her district school."

"I said it was singular," he explained, "because that is precisely what I have done—" And he showed her his newly written letter, addressed to the gentleman friend. Lucile's air of self-defence vanished. "Both of us had the same impulse," he continued, "because both of us have imbibed the Woodney atmosphere, I suppose. Really, I have been so impressed by the notion that we ought to do what we do for others as well as for ourselves that Frank Petterly has recently been taking a back seat in all my plans."

Lucile reflected that if this were indeed true, Frank must be wonderfully changed, for she had never known him to form any plan that did not reserve the best box for himself. She slowly tore up her letter, remarking, "One letter to the gentleman friend will be quite enough; he might imagine that we are too anxious."

Frank mailed his letter, and was not surprised, on turning round, to find that Lucile had left the post-office—not surprised, but distinctly chilled. However, when he stepped out in the village street he was surprised to find her lingering at the door—both surprised and warmed.

He looked at her uncertainly, but couldn't help showing how glad he felt. It seemed to her that if he were so glad he shouldn't show it, and her manner grew remote. He lifted his hat as if to pass by, but he did not

pass by. He gave her another look, gladder than before, and then he said coaxingly, "Come on, Lucile!"

"I have a secret to tell you," said Lucile, suddenly losing her remoteness. "Promise me not to tell a soul." Her manner dated back to twenty years ago. He went back after it.

"Here we are," his heart cried joyfully, "twenty years back!" Aloud he said solemnly, "I'll not tell a soul."

She rested her finger tips on his arm as they went along, and all Westville said there would be a remarriage. All of Westville that did not gaze on that promenade down the rattling planks of the sidewalk heard of it before night and in spirit attended the wedding breakfast.

"I have a dear friend in New York," said

Lucile in a low, confidential tone, as they walked along: "Mrs. Hammond."

"I know all about Mrs. Hammond," Frank declared gaily. "Why, Lucile, I know all about everything you know about —seems queer, you know; but it's jolly, too!" Mrs. Hammond was one of the leaders of society whom Frank had so thoroughly disliked that Lucile's friendship for her had been one of his strongest grievances. "Mrs. Hammond!" he added in an affectionate tone; "Mrs. Hammond—it seems very long since I've heard of her!"

"So I wrote to Mrs. Hammond," continued Lucile, concealing her amusement at this change of front, "just as soon as Robert went to New York. I asked her to find out all about Robert, for I was afraid he would soon be in desperate want. As it happened, Mrs. Hammond was in her country home,

kept there by a round of social engagements, and never had a chance to investigate the matter until recently. But at last she came to it; and when she traced Robert from the address he always sent home she found he had left that hotel two months before and only went there for his letters. He has been doing all sorts of hard labor, and almost starving even at that, but she soon found that it would be impossible to induce him to go back home on account of his determination to make a fortune for Nellie Glenston, or rather, for Nellie's father. She would have thrown more suitable employment in his way, but there was nothing he could do in an office. However, she engaged him to look after her horses, as he thought he knew more about that than anything else, and with the help of subordinates he is now

doing service as her groom—but his pride is dreadfully humbled, and his splendid strength and health is all wasting away."

"When he hears that Nellie has married somebody else—that Mr. Snopper—" began Frank.

"Yes, as soon as he hears that, he'll come right back, for his mother says there'll be no use for him to make his fortune, and pride won't keep him where he's utterly unsuited. They've written him about Mr. Snopper, and we look for him as soon as the train can bring him."

"Blessings upon Mr. Snopper!" cried the other.

"But don't forget that what I have told you is a secret. Robert could never hold up his head if he suspected that we knew to what depths of poverty and privation he

has been subjected. Mrs. Hammond says she has done all this for my sake, for as to Robert, he seems to know nothing of horses."

"Robert will be sure to tell his family every detail of his New York experiences."

"Yes, later on, of course; but none of them will breathe a word of it to outsiders. Robert wouldn't feel a particle of shame in his family knowing how he has starved and toiled; but all of them would perish before letting it get out how his New York adventure ended. He could never have come home but for Mr. Snopper; as long as Nellie was waiting, he had to keep at it. You won't let him suspect that you know, will you?"

"Of course not. It shows that Robert's a plucky boy; his trouble is he doesn't know exactly how to do his plucking. I'll tell you

what I'm going to do. I'm going to establish Robert in my office. Of course he won't know anything about the work, but he can learn, and while he's learning I'll keep him afloat. I wish I owned a church, too, so I could put Uncle Benny in it."

"Oh, now that the truth is out about Baldy the Westville church wouldn't let him leave. I don't know how things could have turned out better: Mace will have her gentleman friend, you will take care of Robert, Uncle Benny will preach to his own people, and nobody knows how Aunt Geraldine's book will sell."

They had come in sight of the Woodney cottage, and Frank felt a sense of loneliness and of incompleteness. "Yes," he murmured, "everything turns out well—except you and me!"

The hand on his arms suddenly quivered,

but Lucile made no reply. They entered the yard, which was now almost dark, and paused at the porch. She sat down on the edge of the floor somewhat wearily. At first Frank rested beside her, as if lost in gloomy thought. Then suddenly his resolution was taken. He slipped to the soft grass at her feet and knelt beside her.

"Lucile, suppose your lover should come to you—on his knees . . ."

"Frank!"

"Yes, on his knees—and suppose he should say——"

"But Frank, *not* on your knees!"

"Yes, on my knees!"

"Then I would say, 'You are my head; rule over me!' "

"Whose voices do I hear?" called Mr. Woodney, coming out of the back room with his wife.

Mrs. Geraldine Woodney looked down and saw Frank and Lucile holding each other's hands.

"Oh," she said, "they are 'People just like Us!' " And she slipped her arm about her husband's neck.